THE UNKNOWN Mr. KENT

by

ROY NORTON

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The Unkown Mr. Kent

By ROY NORTON

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"The Plunderer," "The Mediator," Etc.

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CHAPTER ONE

THERE are just three sorts of men in this world who have an ambition that is worth a cuss! Hermits, billionaires, and burglars; and all they ask is to be left alone," declared John Rhodes on the day when, with painstaking attention to details, he took the last precautions to obliterate his footsteps and disappeared. He might have added, "I'm one of 'em," and if the inquisitive had asked which one, would probably have answered, "Burglar."

Furthermore, there were numerous financiers over different sections of the globe who would have agreed with him heartily, perhaps vociferously. Not that the methods by which, with amazing and cumulative steadiness, he had acquired his vast fortune were more reprehensive than those of other financiers; but because he was endowed with such appalling foresight, steadiness of nerve, and ingenuity of resource that it

seemed impossible to drive him into a corner and keep him there. And this was naturally much of a disappointment to rival magnates. His most peculiar characteristic, however, was such a morbid hatred for publicity that even those who could have identified him on the street were few and it became a tradition that, whenever possible, his business was transacted through agents. Also that of these agents Richard Kent was the one who effected nearly all the largest deals; also that if there was any truth in the adage, "Like master like man," Rhodes must have been a "terror," inasmuch as, in the parlance of the street, Kent was a "Hum-dinger!"

It was admitted that Kent could be neither bullied, bribed, influenced nor employed, because at different times all these tactics had been tried unsuccessfully. There were diverse opinions of him. Some agreed with that expressed by a certain renowned financial light, pillar of a fashionable church, advertised as a philanthropist, moralist, and patriot, who declared wrothfully, "Kent is nothing more nor less than a blithering ass! A fool! Why, do you know, he's so stupid that he can tell Rhodes' money from his own? He refused fifty thousand dollars I offered him as a gift, when all he had to do to get it was to tell me whether Rhodes was a bull or a bear on Steel Common? Plain dishonest, I call him!"

Others, disagreeing, liked him because he kept his word; but most of those were unimportant people, who, therefore, didn't count.

That Kent was astonishingly qualified to act as Rhodes' agent in foreign countries, some were aware; for amongst his conspicuous talents was that of languages, of which he made a hobby. This was proven by the assertion of a distinguished polyglot, who could have given "cards and spades" to the average university professor of languages, being a waiter in a Broadway restaurant.

"He's a heller!" said he. "Talks at least five languages, each one better than the other. And he can cuss in all five of 'em. Found it out one night when he got sore at the head waiter, who was a bit uppish, because there was a short change on his meal bill, a hold-up in the cloak room, pair of gloves swiped from his overcoat pocket by a page boy and the waiter handed him coffee with a harmless little roach in it! And that ain't all, either. He'd had a row at the front door with a chauffeur because the guy flipped his flag and tried to double the fare before this Kent could look at the dial. Fine chance an honest workingman's got with him, eh? He ain't no New Yorker, because if he was, he'd stand for it, and what's more, he'd like it. Besides, a perfect gent don't make no fuss over little things like them. He can

talk some, all right, believe me, but he's either a Boston feller or a piker. Give me one live one from Pittsburgh or Goldfields, every time. You can tell what they are when they blow in; but these big, square-jawed guys like that Kent is awfully hard to place, and every once in a while I make a mistake with his kind!"

Yet on one point every one agreed, that being Kent's loyalty to Rhodes. And this fidelity found further proof when the master financier disappeared, inasmuch as at somewhere near the same time, or at least within a few weeks after it had been announced that Rhodes had gone on an extended vacation, Kent likewise departed from New York. Presumably to attend his employer's interests abroad. He said that was why he was going; but he lied, this being his blunt idea of diplomacy as employed in many national and social circles.

And so, having lied when he stated that he was going abroad in behalf of the formidable Mr. Rhodes, the square-jawed Mr. Kent was now turned loose on war-stricken Europe for a holiday to wander as his somewhat erratic fancy dictated, and cheerfully agreeing with himself that he "didn't care a continental cuss" where the renowned John Rhodes was, what he was doing, what he wanted to do, or what he did. All that Mr. Kent, the agent, desired, was that Mr. Rhodes,

the financier, should leave him, Mr. Kent, undisturbed. He was rebellious.

"John Rhodes," said he to himself, "has bossed me around and run me here and there, like a small boy hopping a cat over hurdles in the cellar, until I'm sick and tired of it. He's paid me well, and I'm fairly well off; but I've sure earned every cent I ever got out of him. He's gone on a long vacation. So shall I. And if John Rhodes doesn't like it he can go to ——"; but at that point of his meditations caution, or perhaps some of his loyalty to Rhodes, overcame his disregard of that amiable employer under whom he had prospered, and caused him to take the precaution of leaving word with sundry bankers of New York, London, Paris, Berlin and Vienna where Rhodes could find him if desiring his services. And, so strong is the habit of discipline and obedience, on second thought he arranged that mails might be forwarded enclosed in protective envelopes, keeping him informed concerning certain financial transactions entrusted to him by Mr. Rhodes. From all of which it might be conjectured that, despite his mutinous disposition, he cautiously realised that, without the fat commissions afforded by John Rhodes, Richard Kent might shrivel as thin as a living skeleton in a freak museum, and be compelled to seek another patron endowed with purse, power, and authority.

Mr. Rhodes' disappearance was noted; Mr. Kent's wasn't. Watchful financiers rumoured it that Mr. Rhodes was travelling in the far East intent on new plunder; but about Mr. Kent there were no rumours at all, and for the simplest of reasons, that Kent had hopped completely beyond the reach of rumour; had hopped almost out of the known world, beyond finance, railways, automobiles, and state highways, into the unknown, unchanging, sixteenth century village of Steinweg. Accompanied only by his factotum, Ivan, who for years had gone with him, everywhere, he had found in Steinweg his two great objects, fish and freedom. Probably he would not have admitted any sentimental or artistic interest in the quaint village itself, with its single crooked street, lined by houses whose gables seemed forever to reach across and whisper of conspiracies, the next robber baron raid, or the public flaying of some poor wretch accused of stealing a purse or a ham. He might have admitted the comfort within the old houses, once one had passed through the low doors to the cool interiors where low ceilings, heavy beams, ancient fire-places, blackened wainscotings and all, were lighted by the cross shadows cast through the narrow windows with tiny leaded panes. This would have been his excuse for renting one of those quaint houses in the quaint street—renting it and all it contained, in-

cluding the aged but competent widow who owned it. Proof of his daring! It requires nerve to rent a widow, although anybody can rent a house.

He paid therefor what seemed a prodigal sum in those wretched, penurious times that followed on the heels of that great war, when old boundaries disappeared and new states either sprang into existence or were resuscitated after decades of suppression. He wished to be free, obscure, unmolested, and within a month he must have been gratified, having been accepted as a part of the village, like the village forge, the shabby little priest, or the town pump, because none might suspect that within his uncommunicative mind were concealed the methods by which so many of the old-new or new-old states had been financed; but not so with Ivan. He commanded an uncanny interest. He couldn't avoid it. First, because of his enormous size, strength and agility; second, because of his strange manner of ignoring all sounds and of speaking only to those who faced him in the light. It took longer to accustom the villagers to this giant, stalking ever at the fisherman's elbow, silent, taciturn, alert with the absorbed alertness of a wild animal watchful to the four ways of the wind. Visualisation is necessary to attract the attention of the unimaginative, and without visualisation they have small interest; hence on a certain night in Steinweg no one had

even the slightest curiosity in either the widow, Mr. Kent, or Ivan, because it stormed; stormed as it can in those mountains, with sweeping rain, thunder that is a punctual and close comrade of lightning stabs; an erratic, capricious pair out on a rampage, like a pair of drunken rioters, one of whom is boisterous, swaggering, shouting, and harmless, the other snapping, deadly, intent, and out to kill. The villagers were inside and under cover on that turbulent night of late spring. So were Kent, financial agent on a holiday, and Ivan, factotum, always at work.

Kent, the master, lounged in the room that he had converted into a den, and luxuriously stuck his feet, carpet-slippered, toward the fireplace wherein surged a blaze that robbed the spring dampness of a winter chill. He wondered if, despite his sense of freedom and independence, he could endure such a place in real winter, and yawned, casually thanking God, in the meantime, that Rhodes had decided to extend his vacation indefinitely. Kent liked him for that decision. Lazily he swung round in his chair to see what Ivan was doing; but the light, a sharp, white flame from the student's lamp on the oaken desk by his side, bothered him, and he held his fine head sidewise to escape its rays. It accentuated the individuality of his square jaws, the lumpiness of his high brow, the whimsical lines at the corners

of his shrewd eyes, the ruggedness of his well-shaped nose, the half-humorous, half-stern crevices bordering his liberal mouth.

In the corner of the room, whose uniform and blackened wainscoting Kent had, with his own hands, desecrated by building a makeshift bookcase, Ivan knelt. His huge shoulders were bent forward and his shock head was stretched, turtle-wise, as he sought, patiently and laboriously, along the well-packed shelves, for a book that the widow had replaced in her customary hit-or-miss fashion. His face, dour and strong, was set like a mask of perseverance, and one huge finger probed methodically along the line of titles. His lips moved, dumbly, as he read. A terrifying, terrific shock of combined thunder and lightning did not disturb him; but Kent started and stared at the diamond-shaped panes that became iridescent with fresh rivulets of rain. An interior door was jerked open and the widow appeared, holding her work-gnarled hands upward, and rolling her eyes with fright.

"I hope it struck the Catholic church!" she exclaimed. "I'm a Lutheran."

She paused to look backward over her shoulder, as if afraid that the thunderbolt had legs and might be chasing her; and then, suddenly discovering that she was safe, made garrulity serve for apology.

"It isn't often that we have such weather here, it isn't! The sides of the house are waterfalls; the street a river; the garden a lake. I was afraid the pig would drown. I brought him into the kitchen."

"And very humane of you," commented Kent, drily. "Why didn't you bring him in here? Any other stock to be salvaged?"

"There's the chickens; but they have roosts, and—a very great bother to bring them all in the kitchen. Unless——" she stopped, put her arms akimbo and stared at Ivan as if to suggest that with his assistance she might manage.

"Never mind! As you say, they can roost," Kent hastily protested, lest she take him seriously and bring not only the chickens but perhaps the cow, a donkey and the family goat into the household.

Another crash of thunder and flash of light so close as to be simultaneous caused her to throw her arms above her head as if to protect it. Ivan did not so much as raise his eyes. His imperturbability exasperated her.

"I tell you," she exclaimed, pointing a declamatory finger at Ivan, "he's not natural! Sometimes he doesn't answer when a body speaks to him. Something uncanny about him, and—and I don't like it!"

"There is something wrong with him," Kent

checked her. "He can't hear. Deaf as an adder, or a bad man's conscience."

Her look of incredulity, her sniff, were equivalent to disputing her employer's word. He thought best to explain.

"Listen," he said, "I don't want you to dislike him. He can't help it. When he was a young man he had spinal meningitis. It left him deaf. Before that he was a tutor of languages. He taught me all I know, so I shall always keep him. He can tell what you say to him only by watching your lips—lip reading we call it in English. I want you and every one else to be kind to him, because he's sensitive. Stop picking at him, and be kind."

She shook her head doubtfully; but won over by natural sympathy said, "Too bad! Who'd have thought it! I see how it is. I had a dog with three legs. Four he had until he had an accident with a scythe. Couldn't pull a cart to market after that. My man wanted to kill it. I told him dogs were like men because nobody wants to lose his leg or his tail if he can help it. And nobody wanted a three-legged dog, and he loved me, so I kept him. I'm sorry I ever scolded that Ivan. He's your three-legged dog and you keep him because he loves you."

Kent tried to discourage her limberness of tongue by picking up a book; but she talked un-

ceasingly while heaping more fagots around the backlog and dusting the ashes from the grate. Her voice, raised to a snap, brought him back from a reverie.

"You've not heard a word I said!" she declared, vastly annoyed.

"Eh? What's that?" he lifted his eyes and placated her with a smile that was rare and winning.

"A man came from Marken," she repeated, intent on impressing him with prodigious news, "Pierre LaFranz, it was, and says there might be a revolution over there that will shake the world! Shake the world, Pierre said."

Kent could not restrain a laugh.

"Don't you bother about the world," he said, soothingly. "Marken's standing army might give the Pope's Swiss guard a good tussle, but—Humph! If Marken went to war the world would probably never hear of it—let alone shake. Why, Marken's so small it's a secret!"

As he proceeded, she reddened with indignation, tried to speak, and then, wagging her head at the obtuseness of a man who could not believe that the two-by-four kingdom, neighbouring on Steinweg, and regarded with awe by every peasant within forty miles, was not of world-wide importance, retired to her kitchen. She slammed the door with a final expression of disgust; but Kent

was already thoughtfully recalling what she had said of that inconspicuous, but completely independent kingdom called Marken, a kingdom so small that on a map of Europe it would be but a tiny pink spot; a kingdom so small that no one had ever taken the trouble to upset it.

His face became grave and he emitted a disgruntled, "Humph!" John Rhodes was again intruding on his peace of mind, and could not be put aside. Marken threatening revolt! That meant that the loan of five million dollars that Rhodes had extended to His Majesty Karl II, king of Marken, might prove worthless. And Kent had met the negotiators of that loan, passed upon their securities, accepted them, and caused that loan to be made. Hang Rhodes! He could afford to lose many times that sum; but the question of the wisdom of his agent, Kent, was involved, and a financial agent's judgment is his sole stock in trade. Kent was rather jealous of his, in a secret way. He had laboriously and with inner pride built up a reputation for infallibility, and now Marken might prove a slap at his judgment. Rhodes wouldn't like it. And there were many other agents who——

He twitted his big, capable fingers together and muttered some unpleasant objurgations consigning Karl II, the Marken state loan, and John Rhodes, indiscriminately, to the outer world. It

was his plain duty, as he was well aware, to travel without delay to Marken and do what he could to protect Rhodes' interests, and that might mean the end of this vacation, and the trout were at their best. Scowling, he swung to his desk, unlocked a drawer, took therefrom a steel despatch box, unlocked that, and sought a paper which he opened and scanned. It was a private report he had caused to be made on Marken affairs, and, now that its substance was recalled and his memory refreshed, it did not appear to add to his mental comfort. He used one or two very vigorous Americanisms, and replaced paper and box in the desk. He thumped vigorously on the floor with his heel and when the huge man in the corner, feeling the shock, looked up, addressed him in a voiceless whisper of the lips.

"Ivan, have you happened to learn anything about a revolt over in Marken? You see more of these tongue-wagging peasants than I do."

The giant advanced to the desk across which he spoke.

"No, sir, not exactly a revolution; but I heard they were discontented over there. Some of the villagers said—you know it is an autocratic government?"

"Yes. Autocratic government with a man born to the job who doesn't happen to be a real, good, all-wool-and-a-yard-wide autocrat. Good deal like

a fellow being born to inherit a farm whose nearest idea he has of a plough is an ice scraper for cocktails."

Whilst Kent spoke Ivan's eyes were fixed on his lips, attentively; but discerning that his employer's speech was at an end, he slowly wagged his massive head, and added all his information.

"They say, sir, that the king is credited with being a well-meaning man, but not just the one to advance the kingdom. They are afraid Marken will be swallowed by some of the big fish around it."

"That's where an autocrat comes in," declared Kent. "A first-class autocrat ought to be a big enough fish to go out, and, under the guise of charity, culture, or some other bosh like that, swallow the other fellow first. Any sort of an excuse will do, just so he eats them, dead or alive. I'm rather a believer in autocrats, myself. Now, if I were advising Karl the Second, I'd say——"

He stopped abruptly, interrupted by a prolonged peal of thunder, and when it died away there became audible a terrific bumping and thumping on the door outside as some one knocked for ingress. At the same moment the door from the kitchen opened hurriedly, and the gnarled widow entered.

"Some one wants in—some one who raps on the outside door," she grumbled.

"Well, let them in," said Kent, and Ivan, reading his lips, straightened up and stepped backward to his corner intent on withdrawing himself now that others desired audience with his employer.

CHAPTER TWO

THE widow opened the door leading from the room to the little storm entrance, a mere square of vestibule, and withdrew the bolts from the outer door. She swung it wide and stepped back. Instantly, as if already rendered impatient by the delay, a man stepped inside. A long raincoat dripped water on the floor and the visor of his military cap trickled until, annoyed, he jerked it from his head and wiped his brow with his hand. He appeared to be scarcely more than thirty years of age, and of slender frame, but with an erect carriage that lent him a false dimension of height.

Close behind him crowded a burly, gray-haired man with fierce moustaches demanding more attention than any other part of his face, who pursed his lips and blew the water from this adornment with a single loud, explosive "Poof!" His eyes, round, pale, and staring, almost child-like but appraising, fixed themselves on Kent across his leader's shoulder, and at sight of them Kent, who had looked up with casual curiosity, smiled slightly and arose.

"We are sorry to disturb you," said the younger man, in apologetic French, "but we fail to find an inn. Yours was the only light. Can you direct us——"

"There is no inn open at this hour. We can perhaps accommodate you," Kent replied, and Ivan, reading his lips, lifted his eyebrows, knowing that within less than a quarter of a mile was one of late habit though excellent repute.

"Then——" The young man turned dejectedly as if to consult his companion, while Kent watched him.

"Perhaps," suggested Kent, "you could be comfortable here; you and—your friend. You're welcome."

Ivan wondered at his pertinacity.

"But her High—My sister and her maid are outside," the younger man said, with faint eagerness. "My sister and her maid, and the man who—their chauffeur. Can you provide for so many?"

"Easily, if you don't mind a little discomfort," was the instant response. "Bring them in. Don't keep them out there in the rain."

The elder man, with a grunt, swung round and reopened the door of the vestibule through which the younger man, as if too relieved to think for the moment of offering thanks, preceded him out into the storm.

"You said there was no inn!" indignantly remonstrated the old peasant woman. "You said that——"

"S-s-sh!" Kent silenced her, with twinkling eyes. "Forget that," he said, quietly. "All you are to do is to see that they are made comfortable. Understand?" he rapped out like an order, on discovering that she still hesitated. Grumbling, but obedient, and more or less subjugated, she turned back toward her kitchen just as the outer door opened and through it stepped a young woman who, without hesitation, walked to the fire and with gloved fingers fumbled at the buttons of her coat, and doffed it with an air of satisfaction, exposing a graceful, well-rounded figure clad in a serviceable tailored costume. Kent, watching her, and ignored, saw that her fine eyes were sombre and absent, as if her mind were concentrated on something other than her surroundings, and that her hands, when ungloved and lifted with feminine habitude to adjust her disordered, exquisite hair, were white and graceful. Her features were refined, sensitive, well bred, and of strength. Her lips, grave, and compressed, made him wonder what they might be like when relaxed by laughter. Tenderness and strength, he decided, were her characteristics and he was not quite certain but what, under different circumstances,

she might appear beautiful; even to the indifferent judgment of a fiscal agent.

Behind her came a most haughty personage carrying a jewel case. Nothing save the fact that she carried it indicated that this might be the maid and the other the mistress.

"Well," said the lady with the box, addressing him abruptly, "can't you offer a chair?"

She fixed Kent with a haughty stare, and he, realising that in his inspection of his new guest he had forgotten to be polite, felt rebuffed, and hastened to make amends.

"Pardon me," he said, lamely. "I forgot."

He drew two chairs toward the fireplace, and was then aware that during his ministrations the door had opened and another young man had entered carrying a suitcase and handbag. This, he decided, eyeing the visitor's long, gauntleted gloves, was the chauffeur. The latter carefully deposited the luggage out of the way at one side, removed his cap and stood by the door. He appeared to be the youngest of the party and was clean and fearless of face and eyes. Kent, the student of men, mentally valuing him, concluded that he liked the young man as one who could be depended upon in almost any emergency. He had scant time for his inspection; for the door from the vestibule again swung open and the two men who had first disturbed him appeared, closed the

door after them and divested themselves of their raincoats. The younger man, evidently the leader of the party, was clad in the uniform of an officer of hussars from which the shoulder insignia was missing, and his high boot tops were here and there splattered with mud, proof that his ride had been far from leisurely. One of the frogs of his coat braid had been torn loose and dangled by a thread as if it had been ripped away in the haste of fastening it, and one of his spurs was missing. He fumbled absently at his belt, unfastened it, and threw belt and sword carelessly on top of the suitcase before turning toward the fire. His stout and elderly companion was far from being as neat in his attire, being clad in a rather startling mixture consisting of a pair of dress trousers tucked into cavalry boots, a dress waistcoat exposing a soiled dress shirt front, and a heavy hunting coat from each pocket of which protruded letters and papers crammed hastily inward. Around his portly waist was strapped a cavalry sabre and, mixed with the papers in one pocket of his coat, projected the handle of a huge revolver. Before he was clear of his raincoat he began roaring orders like an important guest newly arrived at an inn.

"Here, Woman," he called to the aged peasant dame. "Have some one take our horses to a stable, rub them down, water and feed them. Not

too much, mind you! And you might take these raincoats out and clean the mud off the skirts. And bring us all something hot to drink. Quickly! We're half frozen and wet to our hearts!"

With considerable resentment she faced Kent, as if accepting orders from none other, and he, smiling sardonically, made a swift gesture commanding her to obey. She sniffed her nose high in the air, tossed her head and disappeared. The younger man, in the meantime, with an air of great weariness and dejection, dropped into a chair by the side of the fireplace, where he suddenly leaned forward until his elbows rested on his knees and held his white, well-kept hands toward the blaze. On one of his fingers was a huge old signet ring that now and then he absently twisted in distraction, while moodily staring in front of him.

Kent, finding himself still ignored, smiled knowingly and reoccupied his chair by the desk, where he pretended to absorb himself in a book. Ivan, taking the cue from his master, resumed his search of the book shelves as if receiving unexpected guests on such a night was a regular routine, and the young officer by the door, on an invitation from the leader of the group, joined the others by the fireplace in an attitude of respectful waiting.

"Well, we are this far and——" began the elder man, in his booming French, and then, recalling that they were not alone, turned stiffly and

stared at Kent, made a significant gesture of warning with his hand, and changed to a dialect language that was plainly a mixture of German, French and Italian in quality. Had he been observing the financial agent he might have been startled by another flicker of a smile on that absorbed gentleman's features due to the fact that Kent, the polyglot, spoke the language of Marken almost as fluently as he did his own tongue.

"And a close call it was, too, Your Majesty. It was very fortunate that I had the foresight to divert them from following Captain Paulo across the border by——"

The king of Marken interrupted him impatiently.

"Your foresight? Humph! It seems to me that if your foresight as chancellor of my kingdom had amounted to much, we should never have been compelled to run like a hutch of rabbits to save our lives! But, anyway, my sister is safe," he concluded, and then observing that the acting chauffeur, Captain Paulo, appeared restlessly eager to speak, added, "What is it, Paulo?"

"Does it not seem best, Sire, that I stand guard outside the door for at least an hour or two to make certain that we are not pursued, even here across the border? We are but an hour's ride from it——"

He hesitated. The king vented a short, bitter laugh.

"Go ahead," he said. "What you mean to say is that our cousin, Baron Provarsk, is not the sort to pay much attention to boundaries on a dark night when out for a chase?"

"Exactly, Sir."

"Then do as you wish," the king assented, with a shrug of his shoulders and a gesture of helplessness. Instantly, and with an air of willingness, the young officer saluted and passed outside to stand guard in the storm.

"Karl, I can not yet see the sense of all this," asserted the princess, who up to now had not spoken, and Kent caught himself starting at the musical sound of her voice.

"But, Your Royal Highness!" blurted the chancellor, "it would have been extremely dangerous for you to have remained there. I foresaw that, and being a man of action, I——"

He paused, interrupted by the opening of the door from the kitchen and the appearance of the peasant woman wearing, draped about her head and shoulders, a gunny sack that she had used to protect herself from the rain. She glared haughtily at the visitors and spoke directly to Kent, the only one she acknowledged as her master.

"I have put the horses in the woodshed," she

announced. "That fool Peter helped. He is feeding them now. The poor beasts! Scandalous, I call it, to ride animals so hard on such a night!"

Kent smiled at her tolerantly.

"That being done," he said, "you will now prepare the best chamber for our lady guests. Make it comfortable in every way you can. After that, do the best you can with other rooms."

The lady's maid, as if to assure herself of the princess' comfort, arose, saying, "I will help you. Please lead the way," and, when the peasant woman disappeared, followed her. Kent, after a glance at his guests, who, as if too dejected to be interested in anything save their own plight, still stared at the fire, again resumed his pretence of reading. Now and then his bushy eyebrows tightened and his mouth took on a grim, firm look, as if he were slowly threshing his way toward a resolution; but his guests, evidently feeling safe behind the barrier of their language, again took up their conversation.

"What I fail to understand, despite your somewhat lame explanations, Von Glutz," remarked the king with asperity, "is how Provarsk could have hatched his plot and taken possession of the palace before you suspected it."

"A chancellor can not see everything," doggedly grumbled Von Glutz. "And you will re-

member, Sire, that it was you who did away with our secret service."

"Bah! Why not! It accomplished nothing, and cost much to keep."

"Now when your father was alive, under whom you must not forget I had the extreme honour to act as chancellor——" began Von Glutz, crustily and pompously.

"Yes, Father willed you to us," interjected the princess with acerbity.

The chancellor said, "Humph! Hum-m!" noisily, and then, having cleared his throat preparatory to speaking, contented himself by getting extremely red in the face, opened his lips, closed them, and tugged at his white moustache.

"And things went from bad to worse, regardless of all I wanted to do for my people!" The king spoke with a voice of regret and sorrow.

This evidence of sincerity appeared to be the final spur necessary to bring Kent to a decision. He turned slowly around and stared hard at the young man, then abruptly closed his book, tossed it on the table and said, addressing him in the tongue of Marken, "And so, abandoning your good intentions, you ran away, eh?"

The falling of one of the beams of the ceiling could scarcely have proven more startling to the three refugees by the fireplace. The king pivoted in his chair and faced Kent with a look of con-

sternation. The princess, aghast, opened her eyes widely, and the chancellor, bristling with annoyance, jumped to his feet and roared loudly, "What business have you listening? Do you know whom you are addressing?"

To a man who, throughout his life, had been accustomed to see his hearers quail when he vented that tremendous roar, the effect was more than disappointing. The roar seemed to have lost its efficacy; for the financial agent merely grinned at him and snapped his fingers. He even had the temerity to eye the chancellor slowly from his round eyes down to the tips of his boots, then back up again, almost contemptuously, but with infinite good nature. Yet there was something about him suggesting that he might grin just as pleasantly if he were ordering the chancellor to be taken out to the hen house and hanged by his fat neck.

"Suppose you drop that style of talk with me," he said at last, "and sit down like a good boy. Certainly I know whom I address. Otherwise—Humph! I don't think I'd take the trouble. This pleasant little party consists, first, of Her Royal Highness, Princess Eloise; second, of His Majesty, Karl Second, King of Marken, and third, of His Excellency, that clever, astute and far-sighted chancellor, Baron Von Glutz."

He chuckled softly as the chancellor writhed under his sarcasm, stuttered, threatened apo-

plexy, and then added, with a soft drawl that even the language of Marken could not hide, "Don't trouble to speak, Baron, if it hurts you. I undoubtedly have the advantage of you in this, that while you don't know who I am, which after all matters but little, I know all about you."

"You—you—you—Impudence, I call it! How dare you——"

"Easy! Easy, Baron," he admonished, with much of the good nature vanishing from his eyes, and his firm mouth adjusting itself to harshness. "Best not make a fool of yourself. You have my permission to scowl at me. Perhaps it's just as well, so that in future meetings, if there are any, you can identify me quickly and thus learn to suppress what I fear is—shall we say—a rather truculent temper."

The king, who had watched him closely, evidently had greater control of his emotions and faced his chancellor sharply.

"Baron, sit down," he said, quietly. "We are not in a position to domineer. You forget yourself. We are this gentleman's guests, although, as he says, he has an advantage of knowledge."

Kent refused to accept this suggestion that he make himself known and turned to his desk and the steel despatch box which he had opened and took therefrom a packet of papers that rustled as he spread them before him.

"That there may be no further doubt of my knowledge," he said, drily, "and that you may realise how thoroughly I do know you, I ask you to kindly listen while I read."

The face of the princess expressed nothing save expectancy, while the king watched his strange host with a look of curiosity. The chancellor, subdued momentarily by the command of his superior, fidgeted and moved restlessly in his chair.

Without preliminary, Kent read, slowly, distinctly, as if to impress his words upon them, but in rather a kindly tone of tolerance:

" 'In obedience to your request for a thorough report, I submit as follows: After some six weeks of study of the situation, I may add. His Majesty Karl II is in character a well-meaning, morally clean young man. He has neither bad nor extravagant habits. There is small doubt that he cares for his people and has at all times their welfare at heart. His unfortunate failing is that he clings to the old monarchical ideas, but without the strength and firmness to enforce them upon his subjects and thereby control them. He may possibly have the courage to face the issues that are certain to confront him as a ruler, but I am inclined to doubt it. He is too kindly disposed and is given to the evasion of harsh or unpleasant duties, the prompt meeting and deciding of which can alone make his reign a success. I

had not the means of studying him very closely, and therefore may be mistaken; yet I can not help but regard him, until he proves otherwise, as what is termed a Slacker.' "

He paused and looked up at the king, who bit his lip, frowned thoughtfully, and said, quietly, "It is the truth!"

The princess gazed at her brother angrily, and urged him to speak in his own defence.

"Karl! Karl!" she demanded indignantly. "Are you going to sit here and let a stranger dare to criticise you in this manner?"

"If the princess will but listen," Kent began politely, and with an air of deference; but was interrupted by the chancellor, who again blustered until he was silenced. And that, too, without politeness or deference.

"Suppose, Baron, you keep out of this!" Kent's voice was stern albeit satirical. "No, no; wait a moment, and I'll give you an excuse to talk. The best part of this report deals with you, and no doubt an outside appraisal of your character might prove interesting."

He flipped the pages over rapidly, paying no heed to the chancellor's angry protests, until he interrupted with a dry, "Here we are!" and again read aloud: " 'Chancellor Von Glutz is in person a large, pot-bellied man with a bulbous red nose, eyes like a golliwog's, given to boasting, over-

eating and arrogance, who has a vastly exalted opinion of himself; and is, in reality, a man of but mediocre ability.' Steady! Steady, Baron! I've not finished."

"Yes, do be quiet!" insisted the king, with a slight grin of satisfaction.

" 'It is largely due to his incompetence and pig-headedness that the kingdom is secretly in a state of unrest at the time of rendering this report; but it is doubtful if the king will dismiss him from office inasmuch as the baron is a sort of family heirloom. I find nothing to his credit save that he is bluntly honest and loyal.' "

"There you are, Baron!" the king laughed, almost gleefully; but the chancellor, after gasping like a large and overfat codfish hauled from deep water, was now on his feet, bristling with rage, his eyes completely round and blazing, his moustaches quivering, his face red, and his fist clenched and threatening assault on Kent, who grinned cheerfully and said in English, "Hoity-toity! Got a rise out of you that time, you old porpoise!"

"By what right, I demand to know," shouted the baron, "did you dare to send a detective to Marken? You have gone too far, even if we do have to accept you as host. By what right, sir? Answer me!"

Kent's bushy eyebrows closed in a heavy frown and all tolerance and good-humour disappeared.

Even his voice underwent a subtle change and became frigid and emphatic. His eyes coldly met and held those of the chancellor.

"If any one had the right to investigate the procedure by which you and your king, between you, botched up the affairs of Marken, I am that man. Let's be done with paltering, flattery, and rubbish, and talk plainly. I happen to be Richard Kent, who, as confidential agent for John Rhodes, gave the unfortunate advice by which he advanced five million dollars in gold to start Karl the Second, just come to the throne, free from other debt. Oh, I had right enough! You may rest assured."

As if touched by an electric spark, the king arose from his chair, stared for an instant, and then slowly dropped back again with a long sigh of resignation. Von Glutz breathed heavily through his nose, and appeared to wilt into an equal state of helplessness. There was a moment's silence in which Kent sternly eyed him, and then a voice broke out, filled with anger and defiance, that of the princess Eloise.

"And so," she said, scornfully, "the vultures gather on the borders, waiting to fatten from our misfortunes!"

"Mademoiselle—Your Royal Highness! You——"

She swept his attempted defence aside with an eloquent gesture.

"John Rhodes! The nightmare that has been over our heads for four years. Men might worry and work, but John Rhodes' interest must be paid! That magnificent usurer who thrives fat from the misfortunes of Nations, of peoples, of private enterprises. The gigantic spider that crouched behind the war, waiting, that he might plunge forward with money and twist his prey harder than ever. Shylock clutched and hung to his pitiable victims. And you have the affrontery to tell us here to-night, when we are your reluctant guests, with everything lost behind us, that you are the agent of the infamous John Rhodes!"

Kent looked at her in a strange admixture of annoyance and admiration. Here, at least, was one who was not afraid. His eyes lowered themselves to the papers on his desk. And it was as if the great John Rhodes before whom, as she said, kings and financiers alike had trembled, was for the first time being presented to Kent's mind in true light. She waited for his defence; indeed, demanded it as eloquently through the silence of the room as if she had voiced long sentences asking him what he could say to purge from the character of John Rhodes those charges and imputations that she had so stormily assembled against him.

"It is true," he said, thoughtfully, "that I am the agent of John Rhodes. But I have not, as your Royal Highness implies, been set here as a spy in waiting for your flight—for an abdication, or to make terms for John Rhodes' protection. My being here is an accident."

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of disdain, as if expecting a financial agent to evade or lie. It added to his distress. Men he understood, and could fight. He was no quaverer. He had, in his capacity as agent, boldly met and boldly browbeaten half the chancelleries of Europe. His nerve and bravery were recognised by those of far more importance than any one connected with this paltry, petty, betinselled little kingdom that had survived by accident, and whose disruption had been delayed by his own efforts, merely because it was the whim of John Rhodes, for financial purposes of his own, that it should continue to exist.

"An accident?" she said, mockingly. "An accident! They are strange, such accidents as these! Mr. Richard Kent admits to being the financial emissary for the gentle Mr. Rhodes! Rhodes! whose crimes of selfishness and remissness are greater than those of any man living. Who ever heard of John Rhodes ever doing anything to lessen the cares and sorrows of kingdoms, or of peoples? The Rothschilds, with less power than

this hard-hearted American, found ways to save many; but not so Rhodes. There was in them a respect for the dignity of those who had suffered responsibilities and a desire to assist those nations that struggled for existence, and because they had endured, were worthy of some respect and veneration; but Rhodes, the cruel, uncanny, and monstrous genius of money, has no such saving grace. Not even you, his agent, can truthfully tell of one unselfish and kindly act in his career. I am not afraid to tell you this, though 'like master like man' is a fine old proverb in your tongue. And you have the temerity to declare that you were not lying here in wait; that you——"

Without thought she had advanced, as she tempestuously spoke, until she stood at the end of the desk, and he, to meet her approach, arose and, from its opposite side, stood and looked at her. The king and chancellor in turn tried to check her, but she imperiously waved them aside. Her beauty alone would have commanded deference from Kent; but there was added to it the desperate indignation of tricked fearlessness, and a reckless desire to speak that over which she had thought in previous days. It was debt that had ruined her house. And the agent of debt, justly or unjustly, stood before her for arraignment.

"Does not your Royal Highness understand,"

objected the chancellor pleadingly, "that you are making a powerful enemy of the only man, possibly, who can assit us in the future?"

"Future? There is no future!" she declared, impatiently gesturing the baron aside; but Kent, who stood almost stolidly under her words, objected to interference.

"If you please, Baron," he said, steadily, "I prefer that the princess have her say. She is at least candid and honest. From her at least I shall not find subterfuge." He stepped around the side of the desk until his back was to Von Glutz, and also by the change he carelessly and impolitely ignored the king.

"I implore your Highness to proceed," he said, respectfully, yet firmly meeting her eyes. "There is nothing that so clarifies the atmosphere of misunderstandings as freely uttered truths. And—Mademoiselle—even a money lender may be permitted to admire bravery such as yours. I have told you that my being here was an accident. I told the truth. Is it fair and just to believe that I also may not be candid? To condemn me, unheard, as a liar? Neither of us is afraid! I listen."

For some reason that she could not have analysed, her defiance faltered and waned. There was the protest of honour affronted in his quiet musical voice, that had dismissed severity and

command from its tone when he turned to her from the faltering chancellor; and she suddenly discerned in this alien some prodigious power, some inflexible strength, that hitherto, blinded by anger, she had not recognised.

"What is the need?" she asked lamely. "You are in a position to laugh at our distress; a distress that you do not, and can not, understand! Oh, if I were a man——" She paused. He smiled vaguely, at this sign of femininity.

"Other women have said that," he declared, softly. "Other brave women—ever since thrones and kings began. It is the most hackneyed cry of creation. And I doubt not that if you were——"

He turned sharply as the sound of a door opening disturbed him, and glanced across the room to where the lady-in-waiting had entered and stood with her hand upon the latch.

"Your Royal Highness' apartment is ready," the lady-in-waiting said, as perfunctorily as if they were still in a royal palace and undisturbed. The king arose to his feet, wearily, and the chancellor bowed punctiliously before the princess as she slowly turned and advanced toward the door. She paused for an instant, as if torn by a desire to speak again, hesitated with other words on her lips, perhaps those of appeal to the man she had so valiantly defied, and then slowly passed from sight.

CHAPTER THREE

THE king, harassed by his own misfortunes, slowly dropped back to his seat, and resumed his listless attitude while staring into the fire that crackled and glowed as a black log dropped, broken, to be consumed in the bed of embers beneath, symbol of his broken kingdom from which he had fled. The chancellor, diplomatic, become obsequious in the presence of the man who stood as a possible dictator of destiny, stared at Kent, and resumed that nervous tugging at his moustache. Kent, bent from the hips forward, still leaned across the desk, with his eyes fastened absently on the door through which the princess had departed.

"I hope," said the chancellor, apologetically, "that Mister Kent does not take too seriously what the Princess Eloise has said? Her Royal Highness is exhausted. She has endured much tonight, and—at times all of us are worn to irritability."

Abruptly Kent scowled at him and stood erect. Almost resentfully, he said, "The princess requires no champion. She appears abundantly

able to fight her own battles. Better, I might suggest, than some of those stalwarts around her."

Heedless of the chancellor's discomfiture, he walked around the desk and seated himself, with all the air of energy and business capability that dominated him when on guard. He folded the scattered papers, placed them in an envelope, put them back into the despatch box, and then brusquely turned toward the king.

"Now that we understand more or less of the conditions," he said, coldly, "I should like to have you tell me exactly what happened in Marken that explains your presence here in this village. You need not hesitate or stand on your dignity. I have talked with other fallen kings. I have made and unmade some of them," he added, with grim significance.

The king looked at him and smiled, almost sadly, yet not without dignity. The chancellor, after a perplexed and hesitating glance, grunted, wiped his bald head with his handkerchief, and left the task of reply to royalty. The king shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes wandered around the room, as he mentally formulated speech and sought the true beginning. They fell upon Ivan, and for the first time he appeared cognisant of his presence.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "in the discussion

of a subject so delicate as the admission of one's own defeats it would be better if we were alone."

Kent turned toward Ivan. He started to explain the latter's affliction and then, checking himself, said, "Quite right! It is better if we are alone."

It flashed through his mind that it might be as well to humour the king, and also mental habit controlled him, a habit of caution that had grown from the policy that it was far better never to tell anything that could remain untold. He saw that his follower's eyes were on his lips, and said, "Ivan, you may go. I shall not want you this evening."

The giant, alert in his own world of silence, smiled quietly, understanding all that was implied, and turned toward the door with the lost book in his hands.

"Thank you," he said. "If you need me, I shall be in my room. Good night, sir!"

He bowed to Kent's guests and passed out, while the king, with an air of relief, watched his departure.

"Well," said the king abruptly, after a minute's silence, "I tried to reform and be a father to my people without giving offence, and—made a mess of it!"

Kent liked him for the frankness of his con-

fession, and his eyes softened to a more friendly shade.

"His Majesty was not——" began the chancellor.

"Suppose you let him tell it," interrupted the financier. "He seems to have maintained his position as well as you did yours."

The king lifted his hand, palm outwards, toward the chancellor, and it was quite as effective as if the open palm had been clapped over the chancellor's mouth.

"Go ahead," Kent urged the king. "You tried reforms and they didn't succeed. Most of them don't. Er—what particular mania—I mean brand of reformation, was yours? Anti-gambling? Prohibition? Eugenics? Votes for women? Universal peace? What was it you tried?"

At first the king scowled at the American, a good, hearty scowl of outraged dignity, and then discerning that beneath the banter was more or less of sympathy, smiled a trifle sadly.

"I tried," he said, quietly, "to give them more liberty."

"Oh!" Kent let the exclamation slip. And then, after a slight pause, "I remember that yours was an absolute monarchy. Always has been; people brought up to respect the king boisterously when he happened to be respectable, and to swallow their disrespect when he happened to be the

other thing. May I ask what form of liberty you proposed? Was it magna charta, or something like that?"

"Of course not!" indignantly objected the chancellor. "The rights of the crown had to be respected."

"Um-m-mh! So! Sort of curtailed liberty, eh, with a leash on it that could be jerked when necessity arose? Just like an April Fool purse designed by a small boy who lurks around the corner."

"I gave them councils where they could vote," protested the king. "That was a step toward liberty, wasn't it?"

"But I suppose your very able chancellor saw to it that you could veto any act passed, and in fact dissolve them, any time they had plans you did not approve of?"

The king tried to appear offended, and the chancellor was sulky and sullen.

"Did you finally dissolve them?" Kent asked, when neither answered.

"No," said the king, sadly. "I tried to reason with them. That was after one of them proposed a resolution inviting me to abdicate."

Kent leaned back and laughed quietly.

"Listen!" he said. "There are just two ways of reasoning with a man who tries to throw you out of your own house. If he is big enough to

do it, grin and move. If he isn't, call for the police or take a club and chase him into the middle of the next block. It appears they were strong enough to put you out, so—here you are!"

"No, you are wrong," disputed the king. "It was not the people who caused me to leave. It was my cousin, Baron Provarsk, who wants to rule in my place, and who laughs and snaps his fingers at any idea of reform."

"I rather approve of him," Kent volunteered. "How did he do it?"

"He has money. He gathered a good-sized band of mercenaries from the surrounding states, without our knowing it, surprised the palace to-night, which was easy because I have dispensed with much of a guard, and we had to escape."

"His Majesty fails to be explicit," declared the chancellor, crustily. "Provarsk would have murdered him."

"But what I can't understand," said Kent, "is why you didn't fight it out? Why you two come mounted? Why Her Royal Highness arrives in a car accompanied by a maid and one officer? Why didn't all——"

"When the attack was made it was entirely unexpected," explained the king. "I had not the faintest fear that any of my subjects would lay hands on my person. I was unable to defend the palace alone, and couldn't escape and leave my

sister there at Provarsk's mercy. You see, Sir, my sister was also one of his objects. Twice he has tried to marry her. It was because I didn't want her to fall into his clutches that we ran away. We would have remained to fight it out but for her presence. We did hold them off until Captain Paulo had succeeded in carying her away, then,—well—the chancellor and I mounted, led Provarsk's followers off in the wrong direction to give Paulo time, and rejoined my sister here at this village."

"We fought," observed the chancellor, as if theirs had been an achievement scarcely worthy of note. "We held them up from door to door, and charged them once in the woods, cutting our way through and back again."

The king nodded agreement, and Kent, astonished, studied both his and the chancellor's faces as if he had discovered unexpected cause for commendation.

"His Majesty made most excellent sword play," observed the chancellor. "We dared not fire lest we bring others against us."

The king lifted his hand in deprecation.

"Well, you did, Sire," insisted the chancellor.

"No more, nor as much, as you, Baron," protested the king.

"I did not mind that so much as the difficulties

of getting Her Royal Highness to assent," boomed the chancellor.

"My sister," explained the king to the financier, "is—somewhat difficult. She has—and I don't mean this as disparagement or criticism—quite a will and temper of her own. She rather stubbornly insisted on all of us remaining and fighting to the death."

"Positively refused to recognise the hopelessness of the odds," the chancellor seconded. "Declared she would go and face them alone, which was just what Provarsk would have liked. Tried to call for help by telephone, but Provarsk's crew had cut the wires. Tried to shoot a man who crawled round the balcony toward her chamber, but the pistol wasn't loaded. It was very difficult, sir. Very. We had to threaten to carry her away by force for her own safety before she would go."

"Whose task was that?" asked Kent.

"His Majesty's."

"I should say that, too, required some bravery," commented the American.

"It did," assented Von Glutz, grinning drily and stroking his nose, in an effort to hide his mirth.

"And this Paulo is?" Kent questioned.

"The captain of the king's guard, which unfortunately consists, owing to His Majesty's de-

sire to appear democratic, and also to conduct the affairs of the kingdom with the utmost economy, of barely four-score men, of whom but five are ever on palace duty. Provarsk had about fifty followers," he concluded, as if to explain how the palace had been overwhelmed.

Kent leaned his chin on his hand and meditated for a time and then said, "I don't see how you could have done anything else than escape from the palace; but why cross the border?"

"There seemed no other direction open," replied the king, with a heavy sigh of discouragement.

"But certainly, if what I understand is correct, you must have had some friend who could shelter you until you could formulate some definite plan?"

"Yes; but that," said the king, "might have meant civil war. Bloodshed. And I don't want any of my people killed on my account. If they have decided that the country and their happiness are more assured by my going—well—I must go!"

"What do you think on those points?" Kent demanded, frowning at the king.

"If it were anybody but Provarsk——" the latter faltered, with an air of resignation.

"Provarsk is a reactionary! A would-be tyrant! A man who would think no more of taking

one or a hundred lives, than he would of throwing dice for his castle," Von Glutz roared.

"With the natural result that if he gets into power, the people of Marken will at least have a ruler," Kent retorted. "And quite plainly, from my way of thinking, that is what they have lacked. The country has had a king who, with the best of intentions, has been misunderstood. Firmness was the element lacking. To like a man's motives but to doubt his ability to carry any of them through is even worse than to doubt his motives, but be certain that, whatever they are, he will force them over. A resolute bad man is frequently better than a vacillating good man."

The king nodded his head and scowled at the fireplace.

"I admit all that—now that it is too late," he said, in a bitter monotone.

"Too late! Heavens, man, you don't mean to tell me that you are brave enough to cut your way through a band of murderers in the night, after defending your sister, and yet are ready to abdicate rather than make another fight for it, do you? Humph!"

Kent's tone conveyed contempt mixed with wonder.

"I am not personally afraid of anything, sir," declared the king, nettled. "But I do not want, and will not have, hundreds, perhaps thousands of

men killed on my acount. After all, they are my people, as they have been the people of my ancestors for hundreds of years! I have conceived it to be my duty to protect them and their happiness and welfare."

"Well spoken," said Kent. "Very nice theory, too; but it lacks this much: that quite frequently it is necessary to compel people to do the right things for their own happiness. For this reason we sometimes spank boys when they run away from schools; paddle them when they yield to the delights of chewing tobacco; admonish our daughters when they go to places of gaiety that they should not enter; whip our dogs when they begin to delight in snapping at strangers' heels; and a thousand and one other things that make the admonished howl or yelp at the time, but work out for their own good."

He stared in a kindly way at the king for a moment, as if expecting the latter to dispute, and then added, grimly, "If I were in your place, I'd not let this man Provarsk win so easily. I'd fight!"

"I would, if I knew how!" The king spoke impetuously.

"But you must have some friend who can assist you," suggested Kent. "Some man you can depend upon."

The king shook his head sadly.

"There are many who like me," he said; "but they fear Provarsk."

"Pooh!" Kent accompanied himself with a snap of his fingers.

"If His Majesty would run the risk of a war——" began the chancellor.

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Kent. "War, nothing! The thing to do is to beat him at his own game. See here, young man,—I beg Your Majesty's pardon—you've got to do it! You've got to be one of two things, a king or a coward. You've got to decide to-night, too, before the people of Marken know that you have been driven out by Provarsk. Don't you understand that from to-night you are either just beginning or just finished?"

"If I could see any way on earth without civil war," declared the king, desperately, "I'd try it."

Kent studied him closely, with steady eyes, and then turned to his desk and consulted a memorandum book.

"I'm going to be perfectly frank with you," he said, at last. "It doesn't matter much to me who is the ruler of Marken; but I like you for the ideals you have had, and admire your sister for wishing to stay to the ultimate end. And most of all, I've got considerable at stake in this myself, because John Rhodes hasn't much use for a man who causes him to lose a million pounds, and what's more, he's a good fighter. He does pretty

much as I suggest. Besides, this strikes me as an interesting proposition, and at present I haven't much to do. Provarsk is promising. I admire him, too. It requires courage to do what he has done."

He suddenly threw the book back into the drawer and shoved the latter shut with an emphatic bang. He arose from his chair, frowned thoughtfully at the lampshade, then looked across it at the king, who was watching him, as if fascinated by his heavy, square-cut American face. He seemed to have arrived at an audacious resolution.

"I'll make a bargain with you," he said, chopping his sentences. "You assist me and I'll assist you—under—let us say—very peculiar conditions. If you will agree to do exactly as I say, I'll either make a real king of you, or give you a chance to die like a man instead of a runaway. And if we fail, we'll fail together. But I shall at least make an effort to save John Rhodes' money, and you your throne! Be certain of that!"

The king looked at him hopefully, and the chancellor with grudging respect.

"I can't see what else I can do but listen," said the king. "I am—as you see. What do you propose?"

"This," said Kent, deliberately; "that you are to go back to your country and fight it out; but that you are to fight it out just as I direct; that

from now onward, until I have recovered the money John Rhodes lent you, which would naturally mean the clearing of Marken's finances and a restoration of peace and industry, I am to be the absolute, untrammelled dictator of your kingdom. Not only that, but that you and this chancellor, or any other that I name, are to do exactly as I order. I'm to be temporarily the tyrant, the ruler. Also that not a soul on earth besides ourselves is to know that I am such. I can be anything we wish, a visitor at court, or anything that doesn't matter, so long as you and the baron here obey me implicitly, no matter how difficult my demand."

The king gasped and stared at him as if fascinated, while the chancellor went red and white by turns. Both were speechless at the boldness of his proposition.

"Come," he said, in a friendly tone, "you've everything to gain and nothing to lose. You've lost all you had, both of you. And I believe, if you agree to give me a free hand, that we can succeed. Administration is, after all, largely a matter of finance. Furthermore, if you do not agree to this, I am compelled to take steps immediately to ally myself with Provarsk, the insurgent, for the protection of that loan which I caused to be made, and which I represent. Hence, after tonight, I shall be either your friend or your

enemy! No half-way measures with me. I must be one or the other, squarely, uncompromisingly. You must decide."

The king settled back into his chair, and appeared to hesitate and consider, while the chancellor fixed his stare on the floor, greatly perturbed, and quite helpless. The old clock in the corner ticked heavily, and the rain lashed the windows audibly, as if waiting outside the room were enemies, defiant and challenging onslaught. The American slowly opened his strong box a second time, selected some papers with due care, and held them toward the king.

"That there may be no doubt in your mind that I am the original man who made the loan to your government, and that I am empowered by John Rhodes to act as I deem best, you will please read these. They will serve as credentials."

He handed the papers to the king, who read them and handed them back; but with an increased look of respect in his eyes. His gaze shifted back to the chancellor, then, almost absently, so evident was his concentration, to the fire dogs. Plainly he was hesitating, yet devoid of funds or other plans, an exile, tempted to plunge.

"If you were out of money, why didn't you sell those manganese mines you own, or a concession on them for a number of years?" Kent asked the king as if by afterthought.

"Because I could conceive of no one being fool enough to offer me such a sum for a concession," replied the king. "It would require more capital or labour than I can produce to make them pay."

Kent stared speculatively at him, and took a turn through the room.

"I'm not certain that I wouldn't be foolish enough to try it," he said thoughtfully. "I've been well informed that they are valuable. Why not grant me a twenty-year concession, out of which I give you ten per cent of the profit; but with this clear agreement: that I am to have full power to handle you and your kingdom to make them pay? It's the only way I can find to save Rhodes' money for him."

The king looked tempted, yet cautiously considerate; but did not answer in haste.

Kent paced the room thoughtfully, and at last, with a kindly air, walked across and laid his hand on the king's shoulder.

"You are not a king to me," he said, quietly. "You are just a fine, brave young fellow, with high ideals, who deserves a chance. I hate to see as decent a young chap as you are fail, irretrievably, for the want of some one to back him, and to show him the way through. We don't have kings in my country; but we have the young fellows. And I have helped a lot of them, when about all they needed was some one to pat them on

the back and say, 'It's all right, Boy. You're not licked yet! Get up and try again!' And most always, they take heart and go in and win! That's what I want you to do. Go in and win! Your duty is to be a king! And I now tell you, go and be one! If you'll do as I say, Provarsk is much abler than I think he is, if we don't best him, hand and foot. In any event, he shall have a struggle that will make him about the busiest usurper that ever tried for a throne!"

The king, trained to repress display of emotions since childhood, and passed through the course which makes of princes wooden-faced images, forgot all that education as the American progressed, and became merely a desperate hurt human being, craving friendship and support. His lips twitched and strained under this unexpected tender of sympathy. They might have remained unmoved had he walked upon the scaffold of a guillotine, but here was a new emotion, that rendered him defenceless. With something akin to boyish amazement, he stared at the grim, satirical, strong face above him as if to make certain of the character that offered open support in return for secret domination, and what he saw there gave him confidence. For a long time he weighed the situation with all its alternatives, asking now and then cautious questions and receiving reassuring answers. At last, quite like one

taking a final and desperate chance, he made his decision. He stood to his feet, as befitted the gravity of the situation, and said, very simply, "I accept. The concession is yours, and I put myself completely in your hands because I trust you and because I have no other recourse. Our agreement is one of honour, to last until you have secured your superior's money, or by your own word release me from further obligation."

"That is fair; very fair," Kent replied, with equal gravity. "And you may trust me to make my stay as brief as possible, because I've no wish for the job." He paused a minute and added with one of his rare, half-humorous smiles, "You see, the fact is, I never have run a kingdom before. Once when I was young, I ran a sawmill, and after all, running kingdoms and sawmills are not much different. Both consist in seeing that the work is well done."

The king extended his hand to the financial agent, who took it, and for an instant held it, and studied the king's face as if to make a last appraisment of this material with which he must work.

"And I take it that the chancellor —"

"For more than twenty years, as boy and man," Von Glutz rumbled, "I have served the house of His Majesty. And behind me are four generations of my name who have also given all they had

to give. I ask nothing but to serve. The king's wish is to me an order."

"Phwew! That's going some! Takes me back to a gallery seat at the melodrama," Kent said in English, much to the chancellor's bewilderment. But with the chancellor, too, the American shook hands as if this were to seal a binding contract, and then, almost abruptly, he swung round to his desk, seated himself, and was the man in command. His head appeared to set more doggedly, his voice to become more crisp and authoritative.

"I'll take your word for the concession until we can draw it up. Now who is this friend of whom you spoke?" he asked the king.

"Baron Von Hertz, distantly related, who dwells most of the time in a mediæval castle he has rehabilitated. It is less than ten miles from Marken."

"And you can depend on him?"

"Implicitly. On him and all his followers and tenants."

"And how far is his castle from here?"

"About thirty miles, I should think."

"All right. We shall have to use the car the princess arrived in. We three will start at once."

"And leave my sister here alone—undefended?"

Kent stepped to the door, and turned back to answer over his shoulder.

"No, I shall leave my man Ivan to guard her. She will be as safe as if we three were here."

He was gone from the room but a few minutes and when he returned was clad in a heavy raincoat, and carried in his hand a light sporting rifle. He was very brusque and determined in the directness with which he crossed the room, possessed himself of a magazine pistol, examined the clip to make certain that it was filled, and gave an order that was entirely devoid of deference. "You will now call in Captain Paulo and instruct him," he said. "Also there must be no forgetfulness of our relative positions. You are now and hereafter to be my mouthpiece. You are still the king. You will give such orders as I give you as your own, obey my instructions, and see that they are carried out as if they were your own. You understand thoroughly?"

Both the king and chancellor bowed, the latter with a quick military salute of acquiescence.

"Summon Captain Paulo," said the king, accepting his new rôle; and when, in answer to the stentorian hail of the chancellor through the lattice, the officer appeared, the king commanded, evenly, as if nothing unusual could be found in the situation, "Captain Paulo, bring the car around to the door, headed in the opposite direction. We return to our kingdom."

The officer's youthful face flashed to exultation.

Almost he voiced it; but recovered and saluted, while his eyes danced with satisfaction. He would have turned to obey, but the king restrained him.

"Just a moment, Paulo," he said. "Mr. Kent accompanies us, and will remain with us for some time. It is my wish that you obey anything he asks as you would me. Do you know the road from here to the Castle Hertz?"

"Quite well, Sire."

"Then it is there that you are to take us."

Kent gave his first direct order to the officer a few minutes later as the three men climbed into the car.

"Drive!" he said. "Drive like the devil!"

And the car, with big headlights ablaze, roared its way down the village street, skidded as it made a sharp turn, and then leaped out on a long straight road like a racer reaching for a goal.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOR what seemed to Kent a long and perilous time, the car jolted and slipped, and ran at a fearsome speed over long level stretches, up hills, over mountain roads, and at last rushed noisily up a harsh incline and across what he surmised had once been a moat bridge, to come to a halt in a courtyard, where it stood and steamed like a spent racer finishing a course.

"Well! What's wanted?"

A night watchman, flashing an electric torch, challenged them, and they climbed out to observe that the storm was abating, that off on one horizon stars were shining through a cloud opening, and that they stood in front of a huge and gloomy old pile that Kent knew must be the Castle Hertz.

"The baron is within?" asked the chancellor.

"Without a doubt. And asleep as such an honest man should be," was the watchman's surly response.

"He must be aroused," grunted the chancellor.

"Not by me!" exclaimed the watchman. "I'm an old man with a family dependent on me. Can't you gentlemen wait until morning?"

"You go and tell your master that——" Von Glutz began in a hoarse bluster, but was quietly elbowed aside by the American, who continued the sentence as if it were his own.

"That three gentlemen have called here in the most urgent haste and can not be delayed. Also that we are on the king's business. Here! This may help!"

He slipped a gold coin into the watchman's hand, which the latter took, inspected under the light of the torch, bit to make certain that he was not dreaming, and acknowledged by doffing his cap and bowing very deeply.

"It must be on the king's business," he declared. "No one else could possibly have that much money in these times, Sir. I'll take a chance."

"Wonderful what one can accomplish by diplomacy," Kent remarked, dryly, as the watchman ambled around to a side entrance and disappeared. A long wait ensued which indicated either that the Baron Von Hertz might have been hard to awaken, or had calmly murdered his watchman and returned to his repose. And then when Kent was beginning to be annoyed, a huge door in front of them opened, a light glowed within, and they were invited to enter.

"I trust," observed the watchman, meaningly, as he conducted them toward a waiting room,

"that you gentlemen are really on the king's business. Otherwise I fear that My Lord the baron will prove—ahem! a trifle unpleasant. At first he swore that he wouldn't get up for the king himself. It was not until I suggested you might be robbers, and there was a prospect of a good fight, that he consented to arise. He is now loading his shotgun. Pray be seated."

"Must be a pleasant old chap!" said Kent, with a soft chuckle.

But the king, failing to see any humour in the situation, threw himself wearily into a chair without removing his hat or coat, and stretched his legs in front of him and stared at his boots. The watchman took his post outside the doorway, and then, by afterthought, switched on the lights in the corridors, and brought the waiting room to full blaze. Kent, as idly as any tourist, personally conducted, and endowed with a connoisseur's knowledge, stared around at the fine old wainscoting and polished floors. He acted as if calling out a baron of the realm of Marken at three o'clock in the morning were an every-night occurrence with him. He was disturbed by a sharp "Ahem!" in the doorway and looked around to discover a tall, gaunt, white-whiskered old gentleman whose bald head was protected by a flaming red night cap, and who carried a heavy fowling piece in a manner that suggested that he might be per-

fectly willing to use it on slight provocation. The three men stood to their feet and for a moment he glared at them, then entering the room, hastily deposited the shotgun in a corner, turned his head and bawled to the watchman, "It's all right! Go on outside and watch the weather. I'm expecting a hailstorm."

After that he came quickly forward and offered both hands to his sovereign.

"Well, Karl, what is up now? What brings you here at this time of night? Some one been lifting the lid to let the sulphur out?"

"Provarsk," replied the king, sententiously.

The old man smiled a wry smile, nodded to Von Glutz, and favoured Kent with a harsh stare from under his scowling eyebrows.

"It's all right!" said the king. "We can talk freely. This is an American gentleman, Mr. Kent, who is the agent for John Rhodes, the financial magnate."

"Oh! Can't he collect interest in daylight?" demanded the irascible old man. "Since when did you begin to make night journeys with money lenders?"

Kent stood unmoved; but the king rushed to his defence.

"Baron," he asserted, steadily, "Mr. Kent has proved to be my friend. As such I am certain you will regard him."

"Pardon me," the American interjected, "I do not seek the baron's friendship."

Before the amazed old nobleman could recover, Kent walked directly across the intervening space until he confronted him.

"Whether you like me or not, whether you object to me or not, My Lord Baron, is to me of the very slightest importance. There is but one attitude I expect from you, that which is current between gentlemen, and consists of courtesy. That I demand!"

There was an intense stillness in the room as they eyed each other, Kent inflexible, the king distressed, and the chancellor open-mouthed at such uncompromising words. The old baron was the most affected and stood as if stupefied with astonishment. For a pregnant time he met Kent's stare and then suddenly chuckled in his throat with a queer, wise acceptance. He turned to the king and exploded, much as an explorer might have done on announcing a discovery. "Why, Karl! You've got a friend who is a man! By Saint Dominique! This is a man!"

The chancellor twisted and frowned. The caustic inference was not lost upon him; but he had no opportunity for speech, for the baron advanced to the American, put out his hand and exclaimed, "My kinsman needs a few like you. It should straighten affairs out, unless I mistake."

For a time they stood and eyed each other, the one stalwart in developed strength, the other elderly, weak, and wise.

"I have placed myself at the king's disposal," Kent said, mollified. "And that is one of the reasons why we are here. We now seem to understand one another. His Majesty himself will tell you what has happened in Marken. He seeks a friend. He has come to you."

He turned to the king, as did the baron, and they seated themselves around a tête-à-tête table that stood conveniently in a corner of the room, where, without evasion, the king told the baron all that had taken place, observing his promise to Kent that nothing should be said of their private agreement.

"I have undertaken," explained the American, "to assist His Majesty in the difficulty, by advice, and, furthermore, I am in a position to command for him and if need arises will enlist substantial financial support in our enterprise."

His three auditors alike exposed their surprise and gratification.

"I mean it," he declared. "Mean that I am going to save, if possible, the Rhodes loan, though doubtless it may require additional resources. If they are needed they will be forthcoming. The financial side does not in the least disturb us, therefore, and we have come to you because the

king understands that we must have support and possibly refuge. That is all he asks of you. I shall attempt to clear Provarsk out without bloodshed. After that I shall endeavour to advise the king how to rehabilitate himself as the real ruler of Marken."

"But what do you propose to do?" demanded the old baron. "What is the first move? It looks rather difficult to me. Provarsk has brains. He is fearless; fearless in the adventurer way. If you think you have an infant to fight you are wrong. You might lose."

"I never play to lose," retorted Kent. "I make no such calculation."

"Karl," said the baron, after a thoughtful study of the American, "all the support I have to give is yours."

"That being so," hastily suggested Kent, "the next move is to send Captain Paulo back to bring the princess, her maid, and my man Ivan here as quickly as possible. It must not become known to the public that the king has ever been driven from the kingdom. For the present, it will do, if his absence is noted, that he and his sister have been here as your guests, voluntarily."

The baron assented with an enthusiasm that had in it a suggestion of mischievousness.

"That will do nicely," he said. "And it will be easy as far as my part is concerned, because I

have the finest body of liars around me that the world has ever known since Ananias gained repute. Send for Eloise."

After Paulo had been summoned and sent on his journey, they fell to discussing the plan which the American slowly outlined, and were still enlarging upon it when the young officer returned with his passengers. Kent, as though curious to interpret the princess' attitude, was a silent spectator in the background when she arrived, and smiled his approbation when he saw her hasten to the king and study his face, unabashed by the presence of the others, and meet his eyes with an encouraging stare.

"I am glad!" she declared. "Very glad! You are going to fight it out, and drive Provarsk, that unspeakable traitor, from Marken!"

"With Mr. Kent's help I shall try," he said, and, disappointed and perplexed, she slowly dropped her hands, and her eyes sought the American, for whom she had already pronounced aversion and distrust.

"You are accepting his support, rather than——"

Kent, alert and diplomatic, stepped forward to prevent the completion of her sentence.

"Your Royal Highness will permit me," he said suavely, "to say that I am trying as best I can to support your brother. I may be of service or

not; but what I have to offer, I give. And at least we are here, together, ready for an effort."

"And what is more, Eloise," sharply exclaimed Baron Von Hertz, "this is no time for any woman folly of tongue. You'd better be thankful that Karl has got some one back of him that, if I'm not badly mistaken, is going to do things. Hoity-toity! Don't start in to make faces at me! I'm old enough to know a man when I see one. You had better go upstairs to bed. So had all of us. Come on. No foolishness. I'll show you the way. This man—what is that his name is —Kent, has plenty to do in the morning, and I will not let him be bothered by anybody. You just stop any desire to interfere and leave him alone. I'll have my way here. This is my place."

Rebelliously she obeyed, and Kent watched her as she followed the crabbed old man up the grand staircase, while the latter's voice came back through the deserted halls, querulous, and admonitory, until it died away. A half hour later he, too, stood alone in a vast room surveying the bed in which he was to sleep, and as he pulled off his shoes and threw them outside the door for much needed attention, he grinned as if secretly pleased with his adventure. His lights were out within fifteen minutes, but the watchman, wondering, noted that farther along in a room assigned to the young man to whom so much deference was shown, that

occupied by His Majesty, Karl II, the lights did not go out and a harassed guest continued to pace, with monotonous insistence, backward and forward in front of the windows on which his shadow was thrown.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN the city of Marken, the capital of Marken, early rising might have been a crime. Here was no sordid place so highly fascinated by industry that lights began to glow in workmen's homes before the sun arose. Not thus in Marken! The only ones who opened windows in Marken at dawn were those who, usually with night-caps on their heads, poked the said night-capped heads out to look at the weather, then with all observations necessary for prognostication, shut the windows again and retired to "think it over" for an hour or two. True, if the day happened to be fair and somnolent, the sun, shining in their eyes through some quaint old lattice, or climbing almost boisterously like a second-story burglar into the depths of some high-hung balcony, caused them to arise grumbling. People in Marken always did the same things—came deliberately to the front doors and opened them, walked out into the narrow, cobbled streets, took another look at the weather, yawned, thrust their fingers through their hair, grunted "good morning" to their neighbours, and then sought the kitchen sink to wash

their faces. Then, by about nine o'clock, there might be a haze over Marken—a most savoury haze of ethereal, palpitating blue, the blue of a fair dream perfumed; but the perfumed haze in Marken was due to the unanimous habit of frying sausages. The dogs, of which population there was nearly as great a number as of other people, aroused themselves from the doorways, stretched, exchanged neighbourly canine salutations by the customary methods of identification, and then, with noses properly dilated, headed for those places where according to their fixed belief, the sausages grew and might be obtained. Later the children, swarms of them, appeared in the narrow cobbled streets, accompanied by the dogs, all of them adorned by sausage grease on their chops and an air of contentment. Then, still leisurely, the shop shutters began to come down with creaks, and bangs, and bumps, and portly shopkeepers in their shirt sleeves stood in the shade of their doorways, leaning more or less heavily on the doorjambs, and smoked, and read their papers, prior to a general assemblage in the streets to discuss the latest news. Periodically they all arose early, it being the most exciting day of each week, market day. This was due, perhaps, to the fact that the farmers of the immediate country were a quite incomprehensible sort of folk, who were foolish enough to brave miasmatic vapours from the soil

and all sorts of unpleasant things, and get up early. Not that this would have made much difference to the good folk of Marken; but that these same foolish farmers invaded the city with a clatter of sabots, a bleating of kids, the braying of donkeys, and much voluble chatter, so that it was quite impossible for any one to sleep.

The storm of the night had completely disappeared with the dawn and a lazy spring sun busied itself in drying the mud on this particular market day, when some of the more observant arrivals noted with curiosity that for the first time since Karl II had become a king, with vast and delightful ceremony, the gates of his palace were closed and two grim and foreign-appearing sentries stood guard beside the main entrance, each squarely planted in his sentry box as if he had grown there over night like a fungus. And so he had, in truth!

The palace stood on the flat top of a fair hill and was surrounded by a wall. Every good palace has to have one, and all others do not count. Doubtless, in some ancient day, there had been a moat; but this had been filled and turfed. Where in the time of his august predecessors had been a considerable *place d'armes* for the drilling of fighting men, Karl II had created a garden of distinguished beauty in which, it was scornfully whispered by the malcontents, he occasionally

worked, himself, with pruning shears and spade. He had approached sacrilege by modernizing the palace itself, something criminally undignified, inasmuch as no good palace should have either drains or sanitary contrivances. It makes them too much like other folks' houses, and, somehow, people expect kings to be different from everybody else. Furthermore, as a final proof that he was not fit to be a real king, he tried to pay his debts!

From the palace windows the quaint old city of Marken, red or moss roofed, flowering from window ledges, its streets dotted here and there with colourfully-clad inhabitants, could be scanned as it stretched away on three sides.

From the smaller throne room, by stepping to a balcony, on this morning, a great deal might have been seen; but nobody in the throne room took the trouble. There was much other business to be done, because when a first-class usurper usurps, there are usually several things that require attention. At least that was the opinion of one Baron Provarsk, who, on this gay morning, was, as Kent might have said, "on the job."

The usurper sat in a big chair at the head of a table, the like of which could be seen any day, in any directors' room of any bank in America. Neatly proportioned, middle-sized, carelessly but well clothed, and about thirty-five years of age,

he appeared competent. His was rather a handsome, fearless, albeit reckless face, fairly strong, and without trace of any excess. He was more the rapier type of soldier of fortune, than usurpers usually are, and would probably prefer a rapier to a butcher's cleaver. And as far as looks were concerned, Kent afterward said, he "had it on the king."

On the side of the room opposite from the balconied, or garden side, were ornate inner windows looking out upon a corridor, and, proving that the baron proposed to take no chances, there could be seen standing in this generous passageway a file of armed men. As for them, the foreign legion of Africa could not have been more mixed, or mongrel. Apparently the baron had been interested in such of the king's papers and letters as he had been able to find by ransacking the palace. He scanned them hastily, grinning pleasantly now and then. A good usurper displays no more delicacy in nosing into another's palace, than does a cuckoo intent on laying an egg in another's nest.

Provarsk shoved the papers into a heap and picked up several other sheets in his own handwriting, just as a scar-faced man with a scraggly moustache and stubby goatee swaggered into the room and stood opposite his new master.

"I don't see anything to prevent my procla-

mation being sent to the printing office just as it is," said Provarsk, looking up at his lieutenant, who had become such by recruiting from various foreign sources and drilling Provarsk's army. "Here, Ubaldo, read it. Read it aloud so I can hear how it sounds."

The new commander-in-chief of the army took the paper and after mumbling over a flowery preamble which "Viewed with horror and alarm," read the following: "It having come to my knowledge, fortunately, that the erstwhile sovereign of the free and independent Monarchy of Marken, King Karl II, had practically completed secret plans to borrow in the name of the state a second and larger loan than that with which his suffering subjects were already grievously burdened, I, his cousin by direct descent from the royal Dynasty, Ferdinand Matilda George Wilhelm Ludwig Humberto Provarsk, Baron of the realm, did expostulate with him in the name of the people of Marken, and was rebuffed, and threats made against my person. I therefore gathered for my own protection a few followers, but was astonished, grieved, and humiliated to learn that, presumably some time within the past few days, King Karl II had taken all the available funds in the treasury, all the royal jewels, and with his sister, the Royal Princess Eloise, his Chancellor, the Baron Von Glutz (who apparently is a fellow-

participant and partner in his defalcation), and the renegade Captain Paulo, fled to parts unknown. The abdication, to my sincere and lasting grief, is made certain by the fact that the former king and his party are known to have abandoned the sacred soil of our beloved fatherland without legal notice and have been seen on their way to Paris.

"It has therefore become incumbent upon me as one of the hereditary royal family, and as a true patriot, ready to sacrifice himself for the kingdom, to assume at least temporarily the reins of government and to bring chaos from the muddle into which the foolish extravagances and corruptions of the late king and his chancellor have plunged it."

This much Ubaldo obediently read aloud, after which for a time he read to himself, while the baron yawned and drummed the table with his fingers.

"It's all right," said Ubaldo, tossing it back on the table; "but I always like to see them end up some way. Most of those I've helped get up before have something about how the people are to be freed from taxation, work, and all that stuff. Then all of 'em have one of two things at the tag end; they either beseech the dear, faithful subjects and patriots to rest quietly and peacefully until the new ruler, always aided by God Almighty, gets down to the concrete foundations and

straightens everything out; or else they warn the damned public to avoid congregating in groups on any public street, showing any lights at night, making any undue disturbances, or speaking above a whisper, on penalty of being shot dead, instantly, all their goods and likely womenfolk escheating to the crown."

"Um-m-mh! That's so," thoughtfully observed the baron.

"And I should advise the dear-people-keep-quiet stuff and all that," hastily observed Ubaldo, "otherwise we might have a scrap, and there might not be enough of us. Also eighteen or twenty of the army signed on as soldiers with the understanding that they wouldn't have to do any fighting, and there aren't more than three that could hit a barn with a shotgun at ten paces distance."

Baron Provarsk grinned amiably, and hurriedly wrote another page or two, pausing but once to look up when part of the new army flattened its nose against the panes of the corridor window.

"Pull those curtains across that window so nobody can see in," he growled, irritably. "Also see that handkerchiefs are made part of the regulation uniform. Some of your men—er—rather disturb my cultured side."

The new commander-in-chief dutifully obeyed, then disappeared into the hall and swore, pains-

takingly but fluently, in seven different tongues, while Provarsk completed his manifesto.

"There," he said, as if highly satisfied, when his lieutenant returned. "I've added in the gentle appeal for peace and order. Also I've offered ten thousand pounds for old Von Glutz, dead or alive, five thousand for that fellow Paulo, and stated that we are making indefatigable efforts to recover the loot from the royal absconders and have hopes of getting it."

The new commander-in-chief was making mental calculations.

"About that fifteen thousand pounds——" he said, abstractedly staring at the ceiling. "I didn't know you had found that much on tap. Let me see! Fifty men, and me getting ten shares makes sixty, and sixty goes into fifteen——"

"You needn't badger your empty skull about that!" angrily remarked the usurper. "There isn't any fifteen thousand that I know of."

"But supposing somebody does catch the chancellor or Paulo?"

"Then we'll have the chancellor and Paulo killed in their cells, after which we'll accuse the fellows that claim the reward of murder and have them hanged publicly as proof of how lawful and orderly we are," cheerfully replied the baron. "Besides, either old Von Glutz or Paulo will be hard to catch. They'll not show up until long after

I've got so firmly fixed in the saddle that no one will dare try to upset me. I think I shall have this posted on every church and—Well, what is it?" he demanded, as a sentry appeared at the door waiting for a word.

"A man to see you, sir, who insists on an immediate and private audience. Says you will be glad to see him at once. Here is his card, sir."

He advanced and tendered a card which Provarsk, scowling with annoyance, took and scanned. His face changed from anger to one of amusement.

"He is right," he said. "I've an idea that this chap and I might do some profitable business together. No one I want to see so much just now. You can bring Mr. Richard Kent, agent for John Rhodes, Esq., up at once."

The sentry saluted and disappeared, and Provarsk turned to his lieutenant.

"I want to be left alone and undisturbed when this man comes up," he said, pointedly. "When he gets in the room you go outside, shut the door after you, stand guard, to see that no one gets his ear tangled up with a crack in the door, and—by the way—keep your own away, too. This is going to be private business! Strictly private! Understand?"

Ubaldo grinned mirthlessly and said orders should be obeyed. Evidently, at a pinch, he stood

in considerable awe of his new master; for he was threatening to wax voluble concerning his own sense of discipline when the visitor arrived. His advent was preceded by the persistent thumping of a stick on the tiled floor, by sundry titters and muttered gibes from the guardsmen in the corridor, then by his own voice admonishing, somewhat testily, some unseen person to exercise more care and not let him fall.

Provarsk saw an apparently infirm, decrepit and palsied man being half led, half carried into the room by a veritable giant of an attendant, as if the visitor were paralysed from the hips downward and could but drag his legs with difficulty.

"You discern my infirmities, sir," said the financial agent, "hence I crave your permission to be seated. In asking such a favour I—Ivan! What are you trying to do? You lumphead! Trying to let me fall and murder me, eh? Big, slow, clumsy lout! I'll get another valet! I will, so help me Bob! I will!"

His voice had risen by degrees to a querulous, irascible scream that ended with, "There! There! There! Easy now! That does it! Now stand by me with the ammonia. And don't go to sleep if I get faint!"

He settled helplessly into the chair toward which the baron had waved a hand, and panted laboriously as if the exertion had been trying, and

seemed startled when the doors leading to the corridor closed with a harsh clicking sound.

"You are Mr. Kent——" suavely began Provarsk.

"Financial agent for John Rhodes, who loaned this kingdom five million dollars on my advice," the visitor finished the sentence, eyeing the usurper at the opposite end of the table.

Provarsk smiled sadly and shook his head, quite with a regretful air, but politely waited for his visitor to proceed.

"Dangerous man, this. Knows how to keep his mouth shut," was Kent's mental measurement. Aloud he said, "I came here in my employer's interests and was told at the very gates of the palace that the king had abdicated and that a distinguished Baron Provarsk now ruled in his stead, or at least was at present the head of the government."

He paused and watched the baron, who bit his lower lip, tried to keep from frowning, and mentally swore that he must find out which sentry had been so frank in statement and see that his case was amply attended to.

"I presume, therefore," continued the visitor, "that it is the Baron Provarsk I must interview concerning the state of indebtedness."

"That is true," replied the usurper. "And I am Baron Provarsk. Now that you are made

comfortable. perhaps it is as well, considering the confidential nature of our interview, that you dismiss your man for a few minutes, Mr.—ah——" He consulted the card to refresh his memory, "Mr. Kent."

"Quite imposible! Quite impossible! Quite impossible!" declared the agent, resuming some of his former air of irritability. "Can't you see for yourself that he is both hands and feet to me? I'll answer for him. He always goes where I go. Don't mind him. Talk as if he isn't here. He forgets. I pay him for that—and for being dumb. Besides, if he ever said that you said, or that I said, or that anybody ever said anything, at any time, or any place, I'd say he was a liar! All men of affairs deny all interviews and call all reporters liars when it suits their convenience. So they're all liars—everybody's a liar, but you and me."

Provarsk decided that there was quite a lot of wisdom in that speech. It indicated possibilities. Moreover, as it fitted in so closely with his own cynical code, it was up to this money lender to take the responsibility if anything was said that might prove embarrassing.

"As you wish," he said, with a little shrug.

"What I came for, and all that interests me," said the agent, "is to know what provisions the new government proposes to make for the payment of its bonds. They are almost due. I don't

care a rap who pays them. All I want is the payment. Money alone does not change. It has no regard for the hand that borrows, spends or pays. It absorbs no personality, no identity. It has neither fealty nor religion. It outlasts kings and cardinals. It is admirable, being steadfastly itself." His eyes were wide and vacant as he rhapsodized; but now they came quickly to another cast and he demanded, "What does the new government of the great sovereign state of Marken intend to do about the bonds held by Mr. John Rhodes?"

The usurper stared straight at him, wondering if there was intentional sarcasm in this money lender's speech, but meeting a stare even steadier than his own, and devoid of anything save enquiry, resolved to continue in diplomacy.

"I am exceedingly sorry, Mr. Kent," he said, with an admirable assumption of regret, "to say that the late king, my cousin Karl, was not—ah! What shall I say to seem kindly yet truthful?—In fact, Karl was anything but a great and far-sighted monarch. Indeed, he was a plain, unadulterated ass!"

"It appears so. You are here!" drily observed the American, and again the usurper wondered if there might be a double significance in his words. Patiently, however, he resumed.

"He managed the affairs of the kingdom of

Marken very faultily. He was a theorist and a reformer. The Markenite wishes neither theory nor reformation. It is a staid, sober, and self-satisfied nation. It is not the most powerful nor the richest nation in the world; but, such as it is, it is. My unfortunate and lamented cousin did not understand it. It did not understand him. With the very best of intentions, he failed. Failed because he was not adept, as you and I are, Mr. Kent, in financial affairs."

He waited for an instant for this suggestion to sink in, then, satisfied by the twinkle in his visitor's eyes that it had been fully understood, and being thereby emboldened, proceeded in that same gentle, courteous, well-modulated tone that was quite nearly, if not wholly, ingratiating.

"Owing to this mistaken direction of funds, and failure to realise from resources, it will thereby be necessary, regrettable as it may seem at first sight—and at first sight only, Mr. Kent—that Mr. Rhodes' loan be extended, and also that the state be provided with additional funds that it may redeem not only its original bonds, but all others that follow."

Kent was thoughtfully staring upward, but now dropped his eyes to those of his vis-a-vis.

"Quite so," he said, encouragingly.

"It would be—let us say—profitable, for all concerned." The baron's voice had lowered

itself and conveyed much. "It is the business of your superior to lend from his enormous stores of wealth. A man with so much money has but one object, to lend it. You, as his agent, have but one employment, to see that it is lent. Is that not so, Mr. Kent?"

The baron was now leaning eagerly across the big table with a meaning smile, like an angler who sees a coveted trout nosing his bait.

"Quite so," came again the encouraging assent.

"And you, as a most capable agent for the most distinguished financier in the world, perhaps receive, for doing the lion's share, the brainy share, let us say, a commission?"

"You are right about that," declared the American, grinning steadily into the baron's face and inviting him to come still further.

"Then," said the baron, dropping all pretence and confident of his ground, "what use is there for you and me to ride this merry-go-round any longer? You want money. So do I. Rhodes has it—plenty of it. What commission do you usually make on a loan of five million dollars?"

Kent eyed him in perfect understanding, and pretended a certain amount of caution by throwing a quick glance over his shoulder at Ivan, who, with a face as blank as the wall, stared straight in front of him, and even yawned deliberately, as

if infinitely bored by hearing a lot of stuff that he had heard before.

"Suppose I said one per cent?" questioned the American with an air of slyness.

"Then I should say," instantly reciprocated the baron, now fully convinced, "that if you induced John Rhodes to advance another million dollars, you should be entitled to——" He stopped short, got to his feet, rested his palms on the long table and leaned far across, and spoke scarcely above a whisper—"to a bigger commission than you ever had in your life. Enough so that you could relinquish your difficult and burdensome duties, Mr. Kent, and retire. If you can induce Rhodes to extend the time of the previous bonds five years, and to advance five million francs more for ten years, on the same terms as those preceding, I'll make you an independent man by giving you one million francs. Think of it! A million francs for your own! Is that worth while?"

Kent sat stolidly in his chair, and to all outward appearances considered the proposition.

"But what of Rhodes?" he asked, lifting his eyes, slowly. "What of Rhodes? Does he ever get his money? How will you raise it?"

"Sweat it out of the hands and hides of these citizens of Marken!" was the emphatic reply, still carried across the desk in that suggestive undertone.

"And yours? How much do you get?"

"I'll get enough. That is not your affair," somewhat stiffly responded the usurper. "All that need concern you is that I hope, and think, Rhodes will lose nothing and that you will make a million francs. Also that no one but you and I is ever to know anything about it. It is, after all, a clean deal. You get well paid for your work. I get well paid for my management. Rhodes gets well paid for his advance."

Again the American made that queer twisting movement and glanced over his shoulder to reassure himself that Ivan was still standing behind him. The baron complacently dropped back into his seat, beaming with satisfaction. He accepted the conclusion too speedily, as was evinced by his visitor's next remark. Kent leaned slowly back, rested his hands on his hips and laughed. The usurper frowned at him.

"Hot stuff! Fresh from the bat!" Kent said in his native tongue, then reverted to the language of Marken. "Say, I admire your line of talk! I do! You are quite all right! I rather expected something like this. Why, I really believe you are trying to bribe me personally, aren't you?"

"Of course I am." The usurper smiled placidly. "You had no idea I was sending you out into this cold and cruel world to start an orphans' home, or a hospital for indigent and decrepit

chorus girls, did you? I put no conditions on what you are to do with the money. It's for you."

"Have you ever sold any green goods?" demanded Kent. "If not, you've certainly missed your calling."

The baron failed to understand this literal translation of an unknown swindle; but he surmised that his proffer was being ridiculed, and having made his last pitch in this direction, his face hardened and he displayed the real man he was, resourceful, striving for a new hold. He became quite natural, ready to storm his way through, strike, smash under foot, and pass on.

"You jest," he said, unsmilingly. "You think you can play with me. Good! If you don't induce Rhodes to advance another five million francs, I promise you this: that he shall never get a single centime of the money he has already advanced, and that I shall also tell him that you made me take this decision. How does that strike you, Mr. Richard Kent?"

He sat back with an air of triumph, and waited.

"Strike? How does that strike me? Why, very good, Baron, save for this: that I took a few precautions before I came here. In fact, you rather please me, when I recall that you are somewhat younger than I and doubtless lacking in experience. I think you might do well on Wall Street, or in a good stiff game of poker. Ever

play it? That's too bad! You're ignorant of a lot that we teach school boys, over in America. By the way, have you a telegraph form?"

Puzzled by this swift speech, and inclined to believe that the difference in national characteristics accounted for any balk of agreement, after all, the baron resumed his air of suavity, and threw a blank sheet of paper across the table which Ivan, as if schooled to service, laid in front of his employer, and handed him a pencil.

"You said," remarked Kent, with the pencil poised in his fingers and looking across at the baron, "that if I didn't get Rhodes to advance you five million francs more, you would repudiate the loan?"

"I said it."

"You don't dare do it!"

"I don't, eh? Try me, Mr. Kent."

There was the utmost assurance in his words, but his manner belied them as he watched the American, who painstakingly scrawled a message on the sheet of paper, then, almost carelessly, tossed it along toward Provarsk. It fell short, and Ivan, like an automaton, picked it up and handed it on to its destination. With a show of nothing more than cursory interest, the baron read it. It was addressed to the foreign minister of Austria and said: "Provarsk, who is now dictator of Marken, owing to the abdication of Karl

II, repudiates Rhodes loan. The action previously agreed upon between us is now expected and will be responded to as promised. Immediate results will be easy of accomplishment."

(Signed)

"Richard Kent, agent for John Rhodes."

The baron read it with an unmoved face.

"Of course," he said, as placidly as if discussing the weather, "I don't understand its meaning."

"That's easy to explain," declared the American, and there was something in his attitude quite like that of a cat playing with a beetle, or a gentleman holding a royal flush while the others consider. "Austria has borrowed money, quite a lot of it, and wants more, I might add, from Mr. Rhodes. Funny condition attached to that loan, Baron. Might interest you to know about it. Laughable and unusual, in fact!"

He bent forward and smiled sweetly at the usurper.

"Something like this: that loan was granted and the second request considered, with the proviso that if Marken refused to pay that five million dollars, Austria was to immediately take Marken and assume the indebtedness."

Provarsk read the message again, and pondered, while gazing at the sheet. Then he laid it on the

table, impolitely yawned while holding his finely-shaped hand over his mouth, excused himself and drawled, "That was rather neat of you. All right! I'll have it sent," and arose to reach for the bell on the far side of the table.

"Just a moment," the American interrupted. "Why are you so willing to destroy Marken, your native state?"

Provarsk laughed heartily.

"Destroy nothing!" he retorted, contemptuously. "I am merely amused at the bewilderment which will be sustained by the Austrian minister on receipt of this message!"

The American continued to watch him unmoved. The baron, indicating that he would no longer dally with a situation over which he had control, sharply rapped his knuckles on the outspread message and said, insolently, "This is what your countrymen call a bluff! You know it. I'll let you know a little more. It doesn't in the least influence me. You can send it if you wish. I don't care! Furthermore, this twaddle about destroying the country makes me laugh. Rubbish! Sheer rubbish! When addressed to a man who has seized a throne and who thereby stakes not only his fortunes but his life on the result and his ability to maintain himself. I don't care much more about this country than you do, and you may as well know that, too."

"Give me the message," Kent said.

The usurper thrust it across toward him, facilitated its passage by blowing it sharply with his pursed lips, and then calmly sat down. Kent took it, twisted it into a knot, and with thumb and finger flipped it into the air. For a moment they looked at each other, Provarsk alert and with increasing insolence, the American humorously, and secretly pleased.

"Why, do you know," he said suddenly, almost as if speaking to himself and expecting no reply, "you are a lot more interesting and much smarter than I gave you credit for being? Somehow or another, though, I don't believe you are going to put it through. You don't dare to ruin a kingdom. You've called my bluff and now I call yours!"

The baron sneered.

"Don't dare to carry it out to the end, you mean? Try me!"

"Perhaps I shall. That depends. Yes, I rather think I will."

"That old saw about possession being nine-tenths, you know, Mr. Kent?" The baron now spoke with painful gentility.

"That being the case, I suppose I may as well go," replied the American.

"Oh, I shouldn't be in too big a hurry," the usurper said, with a meaning grin that did not extend above his lips. "I'm afraid, Mr. Richard

Kent, agent for John Rhodes, that you shall not make your departure from this palace until you have induced your employer to advance the additional loan. Needless to add that, under these new conditions, you can scarcely expect any commission whatever."

The American did not appear disturbed; yet there was a peculiar watchfulness in his manner.

"Humph! You don't dare to detain me," he said.

"Don't dare to detain you? That's a joke. Don't dare? I dare not only to detain you, but, in case this money lending, penny scraping master of yours doesn't advance, I dare to have both you and that stupid dummy behind you shot and put nicely out of the way."

If he had expected to frighten his visitor, he must have been disappointed; for the latter grinned with the utmost contempt directly across at him and then chuckled deep in his throat.

"You're not half the man I thought you," he said, jeeringly. "I'm quite disappointed in you, to tell the truth. Dare? Why, you wouldn't dare do anything. It's a pity. You had me respecting you as a pretty fair gamester; but this last lot about detaining me, brigand and ransom stuff, cheap melodrama, really hurts me! Call in one of those louts outside, and, by an exchange, take your proper place. You and your mob are, after

all, a lot of penny whistles squeaking thinly in a country lane."

There was everything of studied insult in his tone, his look, the play of his hands as he spoke, and the baron, surprised, upset, angered, and tired by his long hours of excitement, responded as the American wished and lost his temper, and jumped to his feet in a fury. Unnoted by him, the American had given an odd signal across his shoulders by curiously twisting his fingers and waving them, and, expectant and watchful, Ivan had observed and slowly, cautiously, edged around the table side to his employer's elbow. Now he came, inch by inch, a little farther, to a position where he could fix his eyes on Kent's lips. The baron, resolved to exert his authority, came around the corner and reached for the bell. Kent's lips moved noiselessly, although he sat still.

"Now! Ivan! Get him! Quickly!" he said, and the giant whirled and leaped even as the baron's fingers were within an inch of the bell that would summon assistance. One of Ivan's huge hands was clasped over the usurper's mouth, the fingers seeming bent on crushing the lower part of the baron's face, while he threw his other arm completely around him, pinioned him and lifted him from the floor as if he were but a combative boy in weight and strength. He bent him back across the table roughly, then slammed him down on the

top of it with such force that the baron's breath was almost churned from his body; then, swiftly releasing his arm from around the baron's body, he lifted himself on one tip-toe and planted a heavy knee in the pit of the baron's stomach, while the other hand shot to the usurper's throat and threatened by main strength to crush the bones of his victim's neck. The baron's eyes protruded and he began to struggle feebly.

Kent rushed to Ivan's side and attracted his attention by tapping him smartly on the shoulders with his knuckles. Ivan, without relaxing his hold, looked at his employer's lips.

"Don't kill him! For heaven's sake, don't kill him!" Kent muttered.

"I've got to choke his teeth loose. He has set them in the palm of my hand," the giant replied; but was saved from executing the baron, who at that moment dropped back inert, his face purple, and his eyes dazed with threatened unconsciousness. Unnoted by either Kent or the baron, an automobile horn had been tooting lustily outside, its mellow notes playing a trumpet tune that swept vigorously through the open windows. Again it sounded and Kent threw his head up and listened.

"What can that mean?" he voiced aloud, forgetting that Ivan could not hear. "That is one of the

royal automobiles, because no others are allowed to carry such horns!"

It did not sound again and the baron was beginning to recover his senses and anger; although now the latter was curiously intermingled with respect, if not fear. Kent stood over him perfectly calm and self-possesesd.

"Listen, Provarsk," he said, "and make no mistake. My man and I may have trouble getting you out of here; but of one feature rest assured. If any of your sentries come in to take us, or to help you, they will find a dead leader on this table!"

An almost sly smile shifted the grim outlines of his mouth, as he added, speaking entirely for the baron's ears, and well aware that Ivan, watching his prisoner, could not take the order, "Ivan, if the baron opens his mouth to call for help, or makes any attempt to reach that bell, kill him instantly by breaking his neck across the edge of the table. If you prefer, you may cut his head off with that knife on your hip, but make no noise. Do it quickly, and surely."

He saw that Provarsk was impressed with his peril but also saw a sudden gleam of exultation leap into his eyes at the sound which now became audible throughout the corridor, a sound of commotion and a woman's voice raised to an indignant pitch of determination.

"How dare you attempt to block my way?" it demanded. "Who are you and your scrapheap band of adventurers to attempt to keep me from coming into my own palace?"

"But, but, Madame!" they heard the voice of Ubaldo protesting.

"I am not Madame. I am Her Royal Highness the Princess Eloise, and I am going to see and talk to Baron Provarsk, no matter who interferes. Out of my way!"

"That's the bird the baron wanted us to make sure of last night, Captain," another voice, coarse and heavy, called out. "Better let her go in. He'll be glad to see her."

"But the princess does not understand that my orders are——"

It was evident that Ubaldo was retreating in front of her up the corridor toward the entrance to the throne room, and that she was steadily advancing, bravely and impetuously intent on confronting the usurper.

Kent's face hardened. He thrust his hand into his pocket, brought out a heavy automatic pistol, slipped the safety catch off with hands that did not tremble, and planted himself just inside the door. Ivan, obedient to previous understanding that, no matter what occurred after they were in the palace, Provarsk was to be his especial charge, held the usurper down with the steadiness of a stone

man. The noise in the corridor increased, making it plain that the guard, highly entertained, had fallen into the Princess' wake. They heard her turn on them.

"What do you mean by following after and annoying me?" she questioned, angrily.

Ubaldo, anxious to find some means of extricating himself from a ridiculous position, bawled, "The princess is right! Halt, you men! Fall in! Stand at attention!"

There was a quick shuffling of feet as the guardsmen obeyed.

"Now, Your Royal Highness, if you still insist, I will announce you."

"No, you won't!" she said. "All you can do is to stand to one side. I'll announce myself!"

That she gained her way was evident by her entrance, as she swung one of the doors open and, with white cheeks and blazing eyes, stepped inside. Instantly the American closed it behind her. At the sound of the closing door she turned apprehensively like one entrapped, but both fear and anger gave way to astonishment as she grasped the signs of struggle that were before her, the American with pistol in hand, and on the table the discomfited usurper intently watched by the giant, who did not so much as glance up at her entrance.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" she

faltered, all her own resolutions upset by the strangeness of the tableau.

Provarsk dumbly rolled his eyes toward her, but it was Kent who replied.

"It means that the princess has arrived at a most inopportune moment," he said, coldly. "I left positive instructions that neither you, nor any one else, was to interfere with my plans."

"And my brother took orders from you," she said, sarcasm in her reflexion. "And I told him that if there was no man of our house who dared to face this upstart baron, I would do it myself and alone!"

A reluctant approval of her bravery shone in his grim, resolute face.

"How could my brother know," she demanded, as her temper again came uppermost, "that the agent of John Rhodes, who seeks his pound of flesh and nothing more, would not come here and ally himself with this adventurer?"

"I am not without honour," Kent answered, quietly and with a fine dignity of his own. "The situation as you find it is sufficient proof."

She hesitated, bit her lip, and looked back at the other participants in this *outré* scene into which she had recklessly forced her way. The proof of Kent's fidelity to her house was palpable in that restrained and desperate figure stretched out and held relentlessly by the silent giant, and

by the American's readiness to defend her against the squalid band outside.

"You have impugned my motives before," his cold, restrained voice again broke in, and with a quality that she could not misinterpret. "But you have now interfered, seriously, in an emergency whose difficulties are increased by your presence. You have jeopardised our chances; so you shall and must obey what I am going to tell you."

"Must? Must?"

"Must and shall!"

For an instant they eyed each other, and then, frightened by his very domination and strength, she felt suddenly disturbed.

"Come," he said, "we have no time to quibble. If you value your life, or your brother's possession of the throne, you will do precisely as I tell you. If this can not be accomplished with your friendship as an aid, it shall, nevertheless, be accomplished. I expect you to obey, implicitly! It is our only chance."

Overawed by his determined pose, she bowed her head, in enforced assent. He stepped across to the side of the table, touched Ivan on the arm, and gestured for him to release their prisoner.

"Get up, Provarsk!" the American curtly ordered, and as the baron stiffly descended from the table and began with nervous fingers to rear-

range his disordered cravat, Kent glanced swiftly at Ivan to assure himself that the latter's gaze was fixed on his lips. He spoke slowly, distinctly, and with forceful quietness, addressing himself to the baron but with his head slightly turned that the giant might read.

"Provarsk, you and I are going out of this room and through that corridor, arm-in-arm, while you apparently assist me in a friendly fashion. Ivan will support me on the opposite side, because my arms will be crossed, the one on your side being beneath my coat. You will support me with your left side toward me, my gentle friend, for a definite reason."

He grinned and paused to give his words effect.

"That reason being, as you may have surmised, that every foot of the way the hand beneath my coat will be pressing this gun against your heart, and that if you even falter, attempt to break loose, or give the slightest alarm, I'll kill you as remorselessly as I would a snake. Our peaceful progress is the only way by which you have the remotest chance of being alive fifteen minutes from now. If we are compelled to fight our way out, it will be after your dead carcass is left behind on the corridor tiles. Make no mistake concerning my determination and ability to carry this through. This time there is no bluff."

Terrified by the possibilities of tragedy before

her eyes, the princess asked in an awed whisper, "What do you intend to do with him?"

"If he lives through the next few minutes, I shall take him to the automobile waiting there in the street, and kidnap him. After the king has returned to his throne, we shall see! Probably I shall permit him to live. That depends entirely on his behaviour. I expect you to play your part well."

He turned to the baron with a scowl on his face.

"Now!" he said. "This, as sure as you're alive, is a moment of fate for you. Also, lest any of your fool guard might suspect, you must pretend to engage me in friendly conversation. The friendlier the better, my lad, for I shall listen earnestly to that pleasant discourse that I expect to fall from your lips. I have observed that you can talk rather well, on occasion. Open the doors, Princess Eloise, and pass out. You know the way."

Right royally she obeyed, nerving herself to a direct and unfaltering progress. Her pale, cleanly-cut face, the haughty carriage of her finely poised head, and her deliberate, graceful stride proclaimed her the royal princess in truth. So far as any nervous betrayal was concerned, she might have been leading the way to some affair of state. She stared with cool contempt at the little

guard of adventurers who stood at stiff attention against the corridor walls.

Provarsk felt the strength of the rigid arm that clasped his own against the American's side, and the rigid pressure beneath it of the firmly-held steel tube. Any doubts he had relative to the helplessness of his position were confirmed. Any hope he cherished of escape was subdued by the fear and certainty of death, imminent, ready, and inexorable; for now, to increase his discomfiture, the hobbling, dragging man, a picture of physical incapacity, had bent a trifle forward and turned his gaze upward that he might watch even the expression of his prisoner's face. The surreptitious wink of an eye would, Provarsk felt, be as fatal as a shrill scream.

"Ah! My dear Baron, you were saying——?" He writhed mentally at the sound of the high, querulous, assumed voice, and hastened to reply when he felt the pressure of the pistol's muzzle harshly increased against his ribs.

"I was saying," he replied, with cool, untrembling bravado, "that we can finally rearrange our affairs at a later date. At present, of course, you have the best of it."

"Decidedly! Decidedly!" croaked the visitor. "And there is nothing I love better than a man who tries to balance his obligations. But I trust, my dear Baron Provarsk, that the cares of state

which now burden you will soon be over with."

The usurper's face flushed red, but he controlled himself to pass the crisis. This American had taunted him, and played with him in the moment when disaster had overtaken his plans—but whatever else he was, Provarsk was a good sportsman, and, somehow, the humour of the situation, even in this time of stress, appealed. He broke into a cynical laugh that echoed through the corridors and convinced the wondering Ubaldo that there was nothing covert in the situation. The latter even grinned and winked at his comrades after the procession disappeared and declared, "Trust him! He's a fox! Already he has that doddering old ass just where he wants him. Now you fellows can take a rest!"

The two sentries on guard in the gaily painted sentry boxes outside the palace gates decided, when they saw the princess, who had almost forced her way into the palace, reappear and enter her car, that they had done well to admit her; for surely that great leader, Baron Provarsk, whom they had assisted to the throne, talked most gaily when he drove away in the second car with the high-voiced, cackling old man who still clung to him in a most friendly manner. The only difficulty about a revolution, after all, the sentries decided, was that it robbed the invaders of enough sleep, and thereupon they yawned widely and

tried once more to interest themselves in the appearance of the villagers and farmers who passed leisurely with baskets and fowls, totally unaware that they were in the midst of a revolt.

CHAPTER SIX

TWO automobiles, the first a closed car carrying a royal princess who was still in a state of mental turmoil and distress, largely punctuated at times by the knowledge that she had met one man who paid no deference to her title, and the second a long, stream-line touring car bearing on its panels the arms of Baron Von Hertz, and carrying three passengers and a chauffeur in the baron's uniform, stormed up the steep ascent to the Castle Hertz, and came to a halt.

Two men emerged anxiously from the great doors and smiled with satisfaction when they identified the occupants of the second car.

"Got him!" exclaimed Kent, leaping easily from the car. "And, by the way, Baron Von Hertz, if those gates or the drawbridge still work, it might be as well to close them until we finish our business with our guest. He's able, and slippery."

The old baron, chuckling, ambled away to obey the request. Ivan alighted, the Princess Eloise had already reached earth and told her chauffeur to take his car to the garage, and Provarsk, resigned for the moment to his capture, slowly

descended. He smiled cheerfully at the king, bowed with mock politeness, and quite airily waved his hand.

"Good morning, Cousin," he said. "I hope I see you well?"

The king stared at him with smouldering eyes. The princess tossed her head, turned her back, and walked into the castle.

"She doesn't seem fond of me, Cousin," whimsically exclaimed the usurper.

The king disdained reply.

"It's a very cold, formal, inhospitable place to which you have brought me, Mr. Kent," observed the baron, turning toward the American with an air of gentle reproof. "I had anticipated a welcome! Glad shouts from the peasantry! Ringing of joy bells in the castle."

"Why?" questioned Kent, drily. "Perhaps none of us regarded you as worth it." He suddenly dropped all badinage and turned to Baron Von Hertz, who had returned from his mission. "I suppose you have some place where you can keep our guest securely?"

"Several very fine, unhealthy dungeons here," cheerfully replied the baron.

The American thoughtfully stared at the usurper, and then said, "No, I don't think I like that. I don't want him to contract typhus, or influenza, or croup. He's too nice a boy for that. Besides,

I may want to use him, later on. What's up in those towers?"

"That one over there," the baron indicated with a pointed finger, "contains rather a fair prison chamber. Strong enough; but no one has entered it, so far as I know, for about a hundred years."

"Good! Can't it be made comfortable for the baron?"

"Quite easily," declared Von Hertz. "And in the meantime I can have him guarded in another chamber. Bring him along."

Provarsk unhesitatingly followed the owner of the castle with the American leisurely pacing by his side and Ivan in the rear.

"That's decent of you, Mr. Kent," the prisoner said, calmly.

"Why not? I've no ill-feeling against you, Provarsk. We've merely played in the same game and you've lost."

"So far!" the prisoner qualified.

Kent laughed approvingly.

"Now you're talking!" he declared. "That's just the kind of spirit I like. I had sort of lost interest in you a while back. You seemed too easy; but now I really begin to regard you as worth while. Hello! Here we are. Nice room, too."

He walked across and looked through a win-

dow, observing that it overlooked a precipitous cliff with a sheer drop below it of several hundred feet. No other doors save the one through which they entered gave egress. The room was spacious and quite modernly furnished. He walked back and examined the heavy, old-fashioned, cumbersome-keyed lock on the stout oaken door and spoke to Baron Von Hertz:

"Why not leave him here? With a proper guard on the outside, this makes a very nice prison for our friend, the baron. I prefer that he be treated as a distinguished guest, who has a queer desire to remain in his own room for the time being. Have I your assent, sir?"

The fine old eyes of Baron Von Hertz twinkled humorously at the American, for whom plainly he had formed a distinct liking.

"It shall be exactly as you wish, Mr. Kent," he assented. "Also you may trust me to see that your guest does not lack for prompt attention. Indeed, to make sure of it, I shall keep at least four men on guard in the corridor from now on, so that on the slightest sound from within they may hasten to learn what the Baron Provarsk desires. And that even his slightest restlessness in the night may be noted I will also have a night service as well. Prompt attention shall be the rule of the Hotel Hertz. Is there anything he wishes now, prior to our departure?"

Provarsk grinned nonchalantly and threw himself into a chair.

"Some ham and eggs, Landlord, and see to it that the eggs are fried on both sides. Bread and butter. No rancid stuff, mind you, or I'll complain to the management. Coffee! lots of it, with ample cream. The fact of the matter is that some small business affairs of mine have been so urgent that I've not had time to eat during the last twenty-four hours. I shall be glad for a rest—just a slight one, you understand, because I really must resume my industries at the first opportunity."

"Quite so! Quite so!" Von Hertz replied in the same vein. "You may trust me to observe even the most minute details for your comfort."

"And before we go—sorry, Provarsk!" Kent stepped quickly across and relieved the baron of a small pocket pistol and a penknife, while the latter said, gaily, "So am I sorry! Rather hoped you'd overlook them."

He had calmly cocked his heels up on the edge of the casement and was whistling softly between his teeth when they bolted the door on him. Ivan was left on guard for the few minutes necessary for his relief and when he descended the stairs was at once directed to the small reception room in which Baron Von Hertz had received his guests on the previous night. The king and the American were standing in the centre of the room, the

latter evidently repeating some former instructions.

"And you are quite certain that Captain Paulo has had sufficient time and can be depended on to the minute?" the American asked.

"Positive!" declared the king with great earnestness.

"And you will attend to the other arrangements?"

"Yes, Mr. Kent."

"Then here goes, and—good luck to us all!"

The American would have turned from the room without further ceremony, but the king's face glowed and impetuously he held out his hand.

"Just a moment, sir," he said. "If anything goes wrong and—your mission may be dangerous! I want you to know that I appreciate all you have done and are trying to do for me."

The American seemed embarrassed by this display of gratitude. He took the king's hand, but answered, brusquely, "Pshaw! You fail to understand that what I am trying to do is to save my own credit, and to make certain that John Rhodes' money is not lost. I have no sentiment—that is—to amount to anything. Good-bye."

He beckoned to Ivan and passed directly out to the still waiting touring car, into which he climbed.

"Drive us back to the palace in Marken," he

ordered the chauffeur, wondering in the meantime if Baron Von Hertz had neglected to arrange for the opening of the gates whenever his visitor wished. He saw that such instructions had been given by the very promptitude with which they were widely flung, and then settled back into his seat as the car gathered momentum, and carefully took the curves of the winding road leading to the valley below. Speculatively he studied the rich valley with its farms and clusters of farm cottages, appearing from that height like a great garden trimly cultivated, the distant ranges of mountains where carefully maintained forests alternated with fields, and, far beyond, the spires of Marken. It was a land capable of rendering profit, he decided, reflectively, and what was more, he, the American, unhampered by tradition and eager for such an experiment, would see that it did yield profit or prove his own incompetence as a manager. Also, he concluded, this was the finest sport in which he had ever engaged and better, somewhat, than trout fishing.

His meditations were brought to an abrupt stop by a sharp explosion, the car swerved, and came to a halt beside the highway. Almost as the chauffeur's feet struck the macadam he was by his side. The cause was plain, a flattened tire sagging flaccidly under the weight above it. Anxiously the American looked at his watch.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed savagely. "We've no time to lose. Not even five minutes. Any delay at the other end and——" he snapped his fingers conclusively. He stood above the chauffeur while the latter unstrapped an old-style wheel and urged him to haste. He himself seized the jack, but was thrust aside by Ivan, whose mighty muscles sent the lever flying up and down. Together they worked with the adjustment, and again Ivan worked the pump with which the car was provided, grumbling in the meantime that they had to resort to such old-time methods, thereby losing precious minutes from their progress. When he climbed back into the car and they moved ahead at high speed, he again studied his timepiece and said to Ivan, in that voiceless motion of the lips, "This difference of twenty minutes may upset the whole game; but we've got to do our best. It cuts us out of a chance for overcoming awkward preliminaries. Two o'clock was the hour set for everything."

Again they halted in front of the palace and the sentries saw the crippled old gentleman assisted from the car. Baron Provarsk, he explained to them, would return shortly, and had requested that he, Mr. Kent, should be conducted to the smaller throne room, there to wait. Unquestioningly the sentries admitted the caller; for was he not the usurper's friend? And also, the news

had spread, that through this old simpleton money was to come—plenty of it—enough to make them all rich. One of the lounging soldiers of fortune inside even assisted the visitor up the wide marble steps and along the corridor where drowsy men fell back to give space.

Inside the room Ubaldo, Provarsk's captain at arms, sat beside the table talking to two other men, and his face, that had been perturbed, cleared when he saw the American ushered in. He stared at the door through which Kent and Ivan entered, as if expecting the usurper to follow them, and betrayed disappointment that this expectation was not fulfilled. Without asking consent, Ivan led Kent to a seat at the head of the table, as if unaware that this post of honour was reserved for the ruler of the country, then respectfully backed away until he stood to one side of the door.

"Baron Provarsk did not return with you, sir?" Ubaldo asked with an effort at politeness.

The American again consulted his watch before answering, and a look of satisfaction crept over his face. Leisurely he snapped the case shut, slipped the timepiece back into his pocket, leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands together carelessly. A dry grin broke over his lips, as he looked at Ubaldo and then answered.

"No, Baron Provarsk did not return with me. In fact, the last I saw of him he was—er—whist-

ling with satisfaction while waiting for some ham and eggs, some bread and butter, and a cup of coffee to be served with pure cream."

The three adventurers looked at one another perplexed. It was Ubaldo who spoke.

"When may we expect him, sir, may I ask?"

"Why, as for that, not at all," Kent answered, with evident candour.

"For what reason?" Ubaldo demanded, while his comrades looked their intense anxiety.

"Well, mainly for this reason," Kent said, with the same dry grin. "As you, being his right-hand man, doubtless know, the principal thing he wanted was money, and after that power! Provarsk is no fool, I can tell you. Pretty far-sighted, I should say. He wanted to see the king. Insisted on it, I believe. As a result of it all, they seem to have come to a most satisfactory understanding. Quite satisfactory, one might conclude. The baron is thus rendered quite happy by being enabled, with money, to go his way rejoicing. The king is probably equally happy at being enabled to return to his throne without any fuss whatever, and so there you are!"

"You mean we've been sold out?" This time Ubaldo's voice rose to an angry roar, and his two comrades lent their anger to the occasion.

"Put it that way if it suits you best," Kent re-

marked, carelessly lifting his hand to conceal a yawn.

Ubaldo's companions broke for the door and out into the corridor bawling, "Betrayed! We've been betrayed! Sold out by that——" And what they called Provarsk would not have been pleasant to the usurper's ears. Ubaldo turned, hesitantly, as if to call them back, and Kent seized the opportunity to give a noiseless command to Ivan.

"When I get them all inside," he said, "you slip out quickly and see that the palace gates are not barred," and then, speaking aloud, he called to Ubaldo.

"It seems to me that your fellows are making a pretty good-sized noise over nothing. Noise isn't going to help you."

In the corridor outside could be heard oaths, hoarse exclamations and the sound of running bootheels over the tiled floors. Several of Provarsk's adventurers came tearing into the throne room, shaking their fists and wanting to know if what they had heard was the truth. Their leader tried in vain to control them for some minutes, and at last, when he obtained attention, did so by outbawling them all.

"Silence! Silence, there, you men! Who's leader here? You or me? I tell you to hold your

tongues until we find out about this. Do you hear me?"

Slowly and sullenly they became subdued. Ubaldo then turned fiercely on the American, who sat impassive at the head of the table, his manner portraying nothing more than a melancholy, almost disinterested curiosity in his surroundings.

"Now, you limping old fossil!" Ubaldo snarled, "you'll tell us exactly what happened. And don't forget this; if you don't tell the truth, I'll cook you, inch by inch, and then throw the cinders into the streets."

The "old fossil" looked mildly surprised.

"I thought I did tell you," he said. "If I've got to tell it again, suppose you call all your men in to hear it. It strikes me that you're only one of them, and that any man that joined your expedition has just as much right to know what is up as you have."

"That's right! You're right there!" the other adventurers in the room yelled in chorus, some of them in the meantime scowling at Ubaldo and muttering to their neighbours that he was the one, after all, who had got them into the mess. Ubaldo recognised the sign of danger, and tried to quell it; but he was unheeded in the turmoil. Two of the guardsmen rushed out of the room to summon their comrades. Ubaldo was vainly trying to

bring those within the room to a cooler state of mind when the others began to arrive, some of them hurriedly pulling on their tunics and frowsy-headed, attesting that they had been aroused from sleep. Kent, imperturbably watching, decided that they were all there, inasmuch as the two men who had rushed out to give the summons came in last, accompanied by the gate sentries, and the corridor was still.

"All I can say," he remarked, quietly, "is just about what I've said before. Baron Provarsk is at this moment the contented guest of the king. He's in a place where you men can't reach him. I fancy he will remain there so long as he fears he might meet any of you. In fact, he doesn't seem eager to renew the acquaintance of any of you. I don't believe he likes you. Indeed, he has been unkind enough, once or twice, to refer to you as a lot of jackasses, and what he said about Mr.—what's this your name is—Ubaldo? I don't care to repeat. Why, Mr. Ubaldo, do you know, he said to me, Provarsk did, that if all your brains were taken out of your skull and boiled into tallow, they wouldn't make a candle for a glow worm! He said your head would make a fine snare drum! For goodness' sake, man! Don't be angry with me! I'm just telling you what the Baron Provarsk said after he left the palace with me this morning."

Ubaldo grew red with anger and sputtered, and his temper was not assisted by the remarks of some of his army.

Kent observed with satisfaction that Ivan had disappeared from his post by the doorway. In an instant's lull in the turmoil about him, he heard the faint, clarion warning of an automobile horn that played the same gentle notes indicative of the approach of the royal automobile, and, keenly alive to the necessity of holding this swarm of adventurers a few minutes longer, rapped on the table with his bare knuckles and called, in his powerful voice, "Gentlemen! Attention, please! Let me finish."

He waited until they were again quiet, straining his ears the while for a repetition of the horn's warning, but hearing nothing, settled to his task.

"Now let us be reasonable," he said. "You are all reasonable men, I take it. You joined this expedition, somehow, with the hope of bettering yourselves—making money, securing a steady place. Well, you didn't get it. You are done. Your jig is up. You are in jeopardy. You've no more chance than a lot of dogs in a city pound. There is no one now but the king who can grant you amnesty. You couldn't escape from Marken if you tried. You know what they usually do with fellows like you are, when they catch them, don't you? If you don't, I'll tell you. They hang them!

Why, I wouldn't give a centime for all of your chances, unless you can square it, someway, with the king. There's no use for you to fight. You are probably pretty good, and used to it; but fifty men can't do anything against—say—five thousand good, husky peasants armed with everything from a blunderbuss to a high-powered, flat trajectory rifle. They'd get you, sure! The only thing for you chaps to do is to lay down your hands."

He cocked his head sidewise and paused, in a listening attitude, for again he heard the horn, quite distinctly now. His suspense grew and with it ran his resolution to hold this mob to the last moment.

"Don't pay any attention to him!" shouted Ubaldo. "Don't be fools!"

"Why, that's what Provarsk called you," Kent said, plaintively. "He said that if you had had the wisdom of a garden worm, everything would have been all right. And he said——"

"Shut up!" yelled Ubaldo, menacingly, dropping his hand to the hilt of his sword. "I'll run you through if you don't! You men keep quiet. Hear what I've got to say. You don't know but what this old paralytic is a liar, sent here by the king to blindfold you!"

The crowd glared at the American as if this suggestion had not hitherto dawned upon them.

"Very unkind of you," Kent murmured. "And maybe they are already convinced that you are one."

Ubaldo wasted no time in retort.

"The only chance we've got," he said, loudly, "is to hold this palace until Baron Provarsk returns, or until we can make terms! Besides, we've got this old imbecile as a hostage and, if he's a friend of the king's, they'll let us go rather than let him be toasted. Get back to the gates, some of you fellows. Others of you go to the walls. Don't let any one but Provarsk in. I've warned you about that before, and now you see what kind of a fix you are in by not obeying my orders. Get out and ready to defend yourselves," he shouted to spur them to action. But before any of them could obey, the pretended paralytic had leapt from his chair and now stood in the door with his hand upraised, and his eyes blazing at them.

"Stop!" he commanded.

They paused, astonished at his physical agility, and the aspect of power presented by his commanding gesture. Suddenly, while they hesitated, through the corridor rang the loud blare of a trumpet.

"Gentlemen! You are too late! See!"

He sprang to the hangings that barred the view of the corridor, jerked them aside, and the discomfited adventurers huddled backward to a solid

group when they saw that the corridor was nearly filled with trimly-uniformed soldiers of the royal army who stood quietly with rifles at the "Ready."

There was another blast of a trumpet, and the American moved slowly toward the side of the doorway, announcing as he did so, "Here comes the king!"

In a desperate, awed silence, helpless and defeated, they fixed their eyes on the door through which, followed by the Princess Eloise, Baron Von Glutz and Captain Paulo, and accompanied by a body guard, the king entered, walked slowly across the room and then halted and scornfully eyed them, man by man, these who would have murdered him for a usurper's hire.

"I present to Your Majesty," said a calm, sarcastic voice, "fifty gentlemen-at-arms. A fine batch of jailbirds who at present are idle, having just been mustered out."

CHAPTER SEVEN

CAPTAIN PAULO, standing in one of the small reception rooms of Castle Hertz, and staring absently across the lawn on which the morning sun was shining, whistled softly a very gay tune, indicative of a well-contented spirit. A movement behind him caused him to turn quickly, and instantly he came to attention, then made a punctilious bow.

"Your Royal Highness——"

"Is up early. I know what you are going to say."

The princess spoke with something akin to petulance, and being adroit in danger signs, Captain Paulo held his tongue expectantly. The captain of a royal household guard has to be something of a diplomat if he wishes to continue in his billet. The princess walked across the room and looked absently out at the lawn for a moment, then, glancing over her shoulder to make certain that they were alone, asked him a question.

"What took place in the palace yesterday, after I left the room?"

"Mr. Kent pointed out to Provarsk's men the

folly of resistance and made them surrender their arms, after delivering them a homily on the dangers of rebellion, and told them that he would then appear as their solicitor before the king."

"Well? Well?" she urged him when he paused. "What was done with them? Where are they now confined?"

"They are not confined anywhere, Your Royal Highness."

She gave a start of astonishment, as if incredulous.

"At Mr. Kent's suggestion, His Majesty granted them full amnesty, with the exception of the man called Ubaldo, who has been sent to prison on an indefinite sentence. After that, Mr. Kent selected a few of the most likely ones that he said he had use for, and suggested that the others be escorted across the border. He also suggested that each one's picture be taken. Said he thought this would serve two purposes, one to identify them for hanging if they ever returned, and the other because he thought Marken should start a rogues' gallery and this was an excellent opportunity to lay a foundation."

"Suggested! He suggested! And everything he suggested my brother did! I simply cannot understand this situation. How on earth it happened that my brother fell so suddenly and so

completely under the influence of this money-lender is incomprehensible!"

Her annoyance was unmistakable. Captain Paulo was secretly thankful that he was not her brother and was vastly relieved by the entry of that gentleman in person. By the troubled frown on the king's brows the young officer decided that every word of the princess' last and captious speech had been overheard.

"You may go, Captain Paulo," the king said, significantly, and the young officer saluted and discreetly retired, glad that he was not in the king's shoes.

"Eloise," the king remonstrated, with an attempt at severity, "I am sorry to say that I heard what you said to the captain. Does it seem quite fitting that you should discuss our affairs with——"

"Why not?" she retorted, coolly. "It's time it was discussed with some one on whom I can depend, isn't it? If I don't, I'm afraid this man Kent will be running the kingdom as he pleases before long."

The king winced and lost his air of admonishment. He knew, from past experience, that this sister of his dealt in very plain truths. Sometimes they were highly unpleasant. Anger at his own impotence caused him to rush to Kent's defence. Moreover, he was filled with great respect for his

new ally's rough-and-ready method of doing things, that so far invariably had been successful.

"Why should you object?" he asked. "Has he not proved himself a stronger and a better advisor than I ever had before?"

"But there comes a time when advice assumes domination! It looks to me as if his suggestions were assuming the nature of orders."

"Well, what of it?" he retorted, goaded by the knowledge that she had put her finger on the truth. "You wouldn't have me decline to do as he suggests when I can see for myself that those suggestions are exactly the right course to follow?"

"But isn't it time that he were given to understand——"

"My dear sister," he exclaimed, as another loophole presented itself offering escape from this unpleasant interview, "can't you see further than that? How do you suppose this dynasty is to maintain itself without financial support? Can't you fix it plainly in your mind that John Rhodes, whose agent Mr. Kent is, could practically ruin Marken if he chose?"

"Oh! Those bonds again? I thought so. Well, do you know what I would do if I were the king? I would calmly notify this fearsome Mr. John Rhodes that I wasn't ready to pay his bonds, and that he could wait until I did get well ready!"

"Is that Her Royal Highness' conception of honour in financial undertakings?" questioned a dry voice behind them, and they turned to observe Kent standing quietly in the doorway.

"I didn't hear any one announce you," she said, nettled by his unexpected interruption.

"No," he replied, affably, "I don't suppose you did. As an admission, I will say that I'm so unused to court affairs, and dwelling with royalty, and the presence of superiority, that I have not yet learned all that is expected of one under such circumstances. In many ways I'm what we call, over home, a Rube. But now that I am here, I don't remember that you answered my question."

His eyes met hers unflinchingly, insistently. She wondered if there was not a little of scorn in them; tolerant, but, just the same, scorn such as one bestows upon those guilty of moral delinquency. She was driven to defence.

"I feel no compulsion to answer the questions of one who is merely a financial agent," she retorted, "but since you have wilfully tried to misconstrue my meaning, I will explain that there are occasions when, of necessity, one is forced to adopt measures that under other conditions would not be at all considered. This is one of them. The dignity of royalty must be maintained."

"The dignity of royalty—must be maintained, even by the repudiation of its honest debts? You

are now quite explicit. I did not see your attitude before."

Under this sirocco of sarcasm she withered; but still fighting for her standard replied, hotly, "You deliberately misapply my words."

"Motives," he corrected, unmoved.

It was too much! She felt like a schoolgirl being quietly admonished by a head master.

"Since you are so exact," she remarked, petulantly, "perhaps you will try to make me see that your motives in assisting us as you have, and we recognise that service, too, are entirely unprejudiced? That you are here as a philanthropist giving service to our house, one that you have never known! That you are not here because you want to save that person Rhodes, for whom you work, his money."

"That last may be so," he declared, patiently. "I am here to save John Rhodes' money. Do you believe that a kingdom, any more than an individual, can advance itself without money?"

"Honour is better than money," she asserted.

"It seems to me that I've heard that before," he said, smiling. "I didn't know that was in your copy books, also. Since you are intent on fighting me, suppose you draw the line for me by telling where honour begins after one has practically abrogated one's debts. I am interested, Mademoiselle. I would know the ideas of royalty in those

matters. You see, as I have confessed, being an American, I have never before been a sort of member of a king's household."

A slow, patient smile spread over his ingenuous face as he looked at her, and she, more than ever angered at the strange sense of power that this man exhaled, felt herself again worsted in the tilt and in proportion hated herself for her weakness. She felt that it was unbecoming to her dignity of position, that had perforce commanded respect, to her beauty, that had brought leaders of her own class to her feet, to stand meekly and in a ridiculous light before this scoffer from an alien land. She had regarded America as a great blatant nation, without historical precedent, ruled by an official known as a president, who, while in power, must be tolerated and addressed patronisingly, and promptly forgotten and ignored after his departure from office. Marken was, after all, its superior. It was a kingdom! Ruled by those whose ancestors had ruled it for hundreds of years! A king, no matter what his personal habits or strength, must as a matter of course be far greater, and of an entirely superior mould to a mere accident of popularity thrust into power by an impossible people. Once some one had told her, laughingly, that the kingdom of Marken was not so important in the world's affairs as New York, and she, a school girl, had felt highly in-

sulted and looked that place up in a geography to learn whether such a name was really on the map. She felt peculiarly powerless to express to this American her real estimation of him. She did as other royal personages have done before and will do again, affected a vast loftiness and superiority in lieu of other answer. She lifted her head and, with a gesture of indifference, walked toward the door. He did not seem at all overawed, or impressed. Indeed, it was more as if he were inwardly amused, yet desirous of parting friends for future needs. He dared to bar her way, and to stand in front of her with his hands holding the hangings on either side.

"Come," he said, "you are wrong. It is you who do not understand; and understanding is necessary. I've come here to make good. I'm going to do it!"

A strange jargon this. And she found herself pondering its meaning and usage.

"You needn't trouble to answer," he continued when she hesitated in a bewildered study. "But I'll tell you something before you go. It is not yours to play the part of an obstructionist to your brother's hopes and ideals, if you love him as a sister should. I don't know it, but I presume that it is permitted for the sister of a king to love her brother and advance his interests—maybe not. If so, kings and princesses should never be broth-

ers and sisters. Anyway, it's going to be a lot easier for me to—to get John Rhodes' money—" she could scarcely account for the strange sarcasm in his tone—"and incidentally to help your brother, if we act as friends. Come, will you not act as our ally in this troublesome undertaking?"

She was strangely and unreasonably moved by his appeal; for appeal it was, his mellow voice hastening to his will, and his thoughtful, searching eyes fixing themselves questioningly upon her face.

"Unity of action is necessary to success," he added, while she stood before him, waiting for him to stand aside.

For quite a time they confronted each other, he with his hand outstretched, as if inviting her compact, and then slowly his look shifted and lost all its warmth, and veiled itself, and his lips straightened to a harsh, obdurate line. He bowed and stepped to one side, beckoning with unconscious grace toward the open door. She knew that he was wounded by her refusal, and she was no longer aggressive. She fought an impulse to put her hand in his and become, after this relinquishment, his faithful partner in the enterprise; but that meant, she knew, that she must become, as her brother threatened to become, his subordinate, a position against which, by training and heredity, she rebelled. Without looking back, neither dis-

dainful, haughty, nor yet subdued, she passed through the door and away. For an instant his face was grave and hurt, and then, as if arousing himself to his task, an inexorable master of himself as well as of others, his face again hardened and he walked toward the king, who, throughout the interview, had stood with his back toward the room, as if politely leaving the situation to adjust itself.

Kent put his hands in his pockets, frowned reflectively, and said as brusquely as if addressing an office boy, "Please summon Von Glutz and have Captain Paulo and Ivan brought here at once."

And like an office boy the king obeyed. He stepped to an electric button and pressed it, after which he stared at Kent, who stood lost in thought. Von Glutz was the first to enter. He bowed deeply to the king and with marked respect to the American.

"Sit down, Baron. Make yourself at home," Kent said, careless of royal etiquette, and the chancellor, disturbed by this invitation, looked at the king beseechingly.

"Certainly, Baron. Sit down," said the king, smiling a little at the strangeness of their positions.

Captain Paulo appeared and at him Kent smiled and nodded, and immediately afterward the giant

stood in the doorway with his eyes fixed on Kent's lips.

"Ivan, did you serve the Baron Provarsk in person, this morning?" the financier asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! How did the baron appear? Resigned? Cheerful? Or grumpy and discomfited?"

Ivan grinned widely.

"I am not certain, sir, but I think that when I entered he was whistling. Resigned? Perhaps. Discomfited? Not at all. Certainly he did not seem out of spirits. Indeed, he was rather gay. He asked me if I had ever seen a blindfolded dog with a wooden leg playing football with a one-eyed pig, and when I said 'No,' declared that he was rather astonished, because he understood one could see almost anything in America.

"Good! He'll do, all right!" Kent exclaimed.

His lips opened as if to give a command, and then, observing Captain Paulo, he turned toward the king respectfully and said, "If it meets with your approval, sir, can we not have the insurgent brought here?"

The king, appreciating Kent's constant care to avoid humiliating him in the presence of any of his people, gave Captain Paulo the order, and the latter disappeared with alacrity. The chancellor, who, plainly ill at ease, had shifted and rolled himself restlessly from one side to the

other, seized the opportunity to stand up, looking an apology at the king; but the king, evidently good humoured and curious, was watching the American. He could not repress a scowl, however, when Provarsk was ushered in with two sentries in front, two behind, and Captain Paulo bringing up the rear. The sentries saluted the king and stepped to one side.

"You will stand guard outside with your men," the king directed Paulo.

Kent gestured Ivan to guard the door from the inside.

"Good morning, Cousin, and everybody else, Americans included," blithely saluted Provarsk. "Nice weather, isn't it—ah—after the storm?"

Kent was the only one who seemed to enjoy his humour. The king turned his back, walked to a chair and seated himself. For nearly a minute, in the silence of the room, Kent studied Provarsk's face.

"Well, Provarsk," he said, genially, "my bluff seems the best of the lot, doesn't it?"

"Evidently!" quite freely agreed Provarsk. "Only, of course, I don't as yet know just how badly I am let in."

"You'll find that out, soon enough. One usually does, you know," was Kent's response. "I believe His Majesty gives you permission to sit."

"I do," said the king, carelessly, and Provarsk

smiled and seated himself after an ostentatious and exasperating grin at the chancellor, who promptly turned purple with rage.

"You will pardon me," said Kent, drily, as he pulled a chair into a position where he could directly face Provarsk, "if in our conversation I seem to be assuming; but His Majesty has graciously granted me certain privileges of speech and action which he will sanction. Is that not true, Sire?"

The king, reverting to that strange, curious look of expectancy, said it was, and Provarsk shielded his mouth with his finger tips as if to conceal a smile.

"Provarsk," said Kent, decisively, "you're whipped; all the way down the line."

"For the moment, yes, I suppose," the usurper admitted, gracefully. He smiled at the American in rather an amused, friendly way.

"The king has decided," continued Kent, placidly, "that you are a man of some talent, and has therefore concluded to make none other than you chancellor of his kingdom."

For once Provarsk was so completely surprised that his looks betrayed him. He leaned forward in his chair and stared at the American, doubtfully. Baron Von Glutz cleared his throat explosively, and was nearly speechless with wrath.

"This is going too far!" he exclaimed; but was

silenced by Kent, who turned toward him and said, "Steady! Steady, Baron. You needn't worry. You will be cared for later in this—this reconstruction."

"But—but—" hesitated the king, vastly distressed, "Baron Von Glutz has been my mentor since my boyhood, and was the chancellor of Marken under my father!"

"Doubtless his administrative excellence accounts for Marken's present peaceful condition; and also for our unexpected meeting across the border, then!" Kent said, suavely. "But as I understood you, sir——"

Provarsk interrupted with a sneering laugh and exclaimed, "Pshaw! I might have known it. It is you who ask me to be chancellor, Eh? All right! I accept. Under you; but not under His Majesty. But pray tell me why I am thus honoured?"

"Honoured? Well, for several reasons. One that it's not so messy as to have you taken out and hanged. Another that you still represent to me a sporting proposition and I like fearless men who go out after a thing when they want it. It's been a long time since I have met such an interesting sort of a personage as you seem to be, and, inasmuch as His Majesty wants me to remain with him for a time as an advisor, I'd like to see what you can do—whether you can get the best of us."

"I promise to do the very best I can to get the best of you," Provarsk asserted.

"I like that, too," Kent said, heartily. "You're welcome to get away with all you can; with this understanding, that you must agree to accept and honestly carry out all orders given you. Otherwise——"

"Otherwise what?" queried the baron, when the American hesitated.

"Otherwise we'll have you promptly shot. Also, you are 'honoured,' as you put it, because I believe you are a good enough gamester, once having given your word, to obey orders."

Provarsk studied Kent, wonderingly, while the latter, without a change of expression, stared back at him.

"You don't want to be bothered hanging or shooting me, now; you think I'm too dangerous to exile; and you therefore prefer to keep me directly under your eye. So you appoint me chancellor! Rather clever, it strikes me."

Kent nodded and smiled.

"You have it," he said.

"All right, Mr. Richard Kent, I accept this chancellorship, and agree to obey all of your orders—or should I say His Majesty's?—with just one provision, which is that after one year's service I have the privilege of resigning and walking away, scot free, whenever I choose to do so."

"Quite a nice agreement! A very pleasant agreement, indeed!" Kent assented. "We will now have an interview with Captain Paulo."

He gave Ivan the order, speaking loudly, as though to impress on the new chancellor that his man was a trifle hard of hearing, and in a moment Captain Paulo stood before them.

"Captain Paulo," said Kent, "His Majesty, the king, has graciously delegated me to reorganise the cabinet of Marken, and, because of your fidelity, you are now appointed Minister of the Treasury."

Paulo stood with a look of astonishment on his face. It was an advancement that he had never thought of. Truly there must have been some foundation for the Arabian Nights. For once the king was not disturbed by the American's plans, and began to wonder if, after all, there was not some method in this new form of madness.

"Those are my wishes, Captain Paulo," said he.

Kent bowed his head gravely to the new Minister of the Treasury.

"Permit me to introduce the new Chancellor of the realm, Baron Provarsk."

Paulo found it difficult to bow; but by desperate effort did so. Provarsk acknowledged this deference to his position by an airy, "That's all right, Paulo. Never can tell what your luck may be. Perhaps I'll make you a field marshal

yet," a piece of pleasantry that Kent appreciated with a slight smile, and which the king plainly resented.

"And the Baron Provarsk is therefore now at liberty?" queried Paulo, evidently unable to grasp the extraordinary changes that had taken place.

"My goodness, man! Your Excellency, the Minister of the Treasury, does not suggest that so exalted and important official as the chancellor of the realm should be pinched, do you?" Kent asked, with unsmiling lips.

"Why, I should say not!" exclaimed Provarsk, with a great assumption of dignity. "I couldn't think of such a thing! I've a mind to ask my cousin to instantly remove you from office!"

"If I am to act as cabinet minister——" began Paulo.

"I would suggest that you and the chancellor retire to the anteroom, and come to an amicable agreement to leave each other alone," Kent interrupted. "His Majesty expects you to do so. It must be understood that all previous differences have, from the moment of His Majesty's appointments, been obliterated."

Provarsk arose with an air of relief, bowed deeply to the king, eyed Kent quizzically, and led the way. Paulo, still bewildered, made his salutes and followed after, leaving the American with his eyes fixed on Von Glutz, who had steadily drooped

and wilted into an effigy of injured innocence, not unlike a wilted turnip.

"Baron," Kent began, "all this may appear a trifle strange to you; but I have reasons."

"Does it not seem to you, Mr. Kent, that you are in a measure taking advantage of our somewhat singular position?" the king asked. "I am still striving to keep my share of our agreement; but I can not quite grasp——"

"You aren't supposed to grasp anything, owing to that agreement," was the concise retort. "You were, and still are, in a passive position. It's my job to pull you out. I'm probably upsetting a lot of precedents; but I take the responsibility for running this board of directors—pardon! I mean this kingdom—in my own way."

Rebuffed, the king met Kent's look, and then, reassured by the intelligence he saw there, said, "I am sorry to have interfered. I am doing the best I can to learn. It requires some patience, under the circumstances, to——"

He stopped, the confession itself being difficult; but the American liked him for his outburst. Indeed, he decided there might be some hope for the king, properly handled.

"Our ways are different," he said, less aggressively. "Your way has been tried and failed. Therefore mine can be no worse."

He faced Von Glutz again, and was about to

speak, when, as if it were her particular mission in life to interfere, the Princess Eloise came hurriedly into the room, again with full danger signals flying.

"Karl," she asked, "is it true, as Provarsk just now informed me, in the ante-room, that you have appointed him chancellor of Marken?"

"It is true," the king replied.

"Then," she declared stormily, "I suppose this outrage is also due to the sage advice of your new friend, Mr. Kent? Are you still the king of Marken, may I ask? Or are you a marionette pulled by a string? Have you gone mad? Have you no spirit left?"

Exasperated by her return as well as by the contempt that had so deftly conveyed itself in the selection of her words, the king forgot his promise of secrecy to the American.

"Eloise," he replied, desperately, "sheer force of circumstances have for the time being drawn me into a pact with Mr. Kent, by which he is to have the controlling voice in the affairs of the kingdom. You forget that without his efforts we should scarcely be here now. So far he has proven——"

"Why doesn't he have himself crowned?"

The king did not answer. Kent was amused. She stared at him as he sat noiselessly drumming his fingers on the arm of his chair, entirely self-

possessed, and apparently indifferent to anything she might say.

"I suppose it was you, then, who appointed our enemy Provarsk to the position of chancellor?" she said.

"The king appoints. I merely advise," he replied, with a smile in the corners of his eyes that stretched slowly downward until it created circumflex wrinkles around his firm lips.

"What is to become of Baron Von Glutz?" she demanded, directly to the point.

The American slowly moved his head in the baron's direction and assumed a deep study of that person that caused the latter to squirm, puff his cheeks, and adopt the habitual recourse of tugging at his moustache.

"Do you know," replied Kent slowly, "that is the question which has bothered me a whole lot. I've given considerable thought to him and —er—I hardly know what to do with him. At first I thought of appointing him the king's dog-catcher. Then, observing something faintly suggesting a military character, a regular fighting general behind the lines—a long way behind—I concluded that he might make a good minister of war. That is one of the most important places in every kingdom of this kind. The smaller the army, the more important the position. There

is such a billet as that in Marken, isn't there?" he concluded in a bland tone of inquiry.

Von Glutz was the first to recover from this attack.

"When one has been a chancellor, it is rather difficult to step back to a portfolio," he protested.

"Then why not step out into private life?" retorted Kent, and added with great enthusiasm: "It would be such a change for you! By Jove! That's the very thing! Become a plain citizen! All sorts of things to do. Opportunities to criticise the government. Tell admiring friends what you would have done if you had been chancellor. Point out the incumbent's mistakes. Get a lot of figures together to show wasteful extravagance in expenditures. Tariff reform. Income tax. Workingman's friend. Poor girls' benefactor. Be a Cromwell, and get the power of a king by having His Majesty's head cut off. Or a Bismarck, freely lieing, breaking all covenants, and have yourself made a prince. Sort of fellow-citizen, friend-of-the-people, Napoleon, and clap the crown on your bald head. You might even Cookize, and discover a new North pole. Say! If you've been a good chancellor, why did the hen cross the road? Why was Provarsk?"

He paused with mock earnestness, waiting deferentially for a reply.

"You don't answer," he continued, and again

that subtle change that distinguished him was apparent. "Baron Von Glutz, I respect you for being an honest man, and a faithful one. But there has been a task that you could not grasp. There are many different kinds of brains in this world. Yours was not the kind for the place. This one requires a callosity that you don't possess. You can't cheat, or dissimulate. You can't bluff. You were not a good chancellor. So I've made you Minister of War. Do you want the place?"

The baron gave a heavy sigh, and looked doubtful. Apprehensive lest he decline the proffered portfolio, the princess hastened to urge his acceptance.

"Since there seems no way of disregarding our new advisor's wishes, Baron Von Glutz, I ask you in my own behalf to accept. If you should retire to private life you would leave me with one less friend in whom I can confide. There is none left, now, save Paulo."

The American did not dispute her; but the king looked at her strangely and said, "That is unfair, Eloise."

She paid no attention to him but walked across until she stood by the baron's side.

"For my sake, old friend," she appealed, and Von Glutz, for whom Kent was secretly rather sorry, lifted his head and said, "Very well. I accept."

"Good!" said Kent, bluntly.

He waited, as if expecting the princess to leave the room; but she, divining his wish, stubbornly made her way to a chair and seated herself with the evident intention of remaining indefinitely. Observing this, Kent smiled slightly, and announced himself.

"Having thus come so easily through our reorganisation, and now being on such nice, friendly terms of amity and unity," he said, "we may as well get down to business and understand what we propose to do. I have studied the situation pretty thoroughly. First, we have army enough now to do police duty. That is what it shall do. Next, we shall have conscription."

His hearers gave a gasp of dismay.

"The trouble with a large majority of Markenites," he went on, "is that they are lazy. They don't produce enough. Therefore we will have conscription for labour, and compel them to work whether they want to or not. If they don't obey, we confiscate their property and throw them out of the kingdom. I'm going to compel every man in Marken to earn more money than he ever has hitherto!"

His voice was now hard and emphatic, and he punctuated his declaration by rapping the table with his knuckles.

"I'm going to make them rich, and the kingdom

rich, whether they like it or not. When a country is in such distress as this kingdom is, it needs an autocrat and, by Heavens! it has one now! Those mines shall work full tilt, and this government is going to force the building of factories and encourage industries. The kingdom of Marken shall not only pay its debts, but while doing it, shall learn how to keep out of debt."

The king could not entirely repress a look of enthusiasm; but the princess was still rebellious.

"And may I ask what rôle the modest Mr. Kent proposes to play in all this miraculous work?" she inquired.

"I've thought of that, too," cheerfully replied Mr. Kent, ignoring the inference that he had been boasting. "Some kings have officials known as 'The King's Remembrancer,' whose job it is to stand at the king's elbow and remind him of what he has to do. I shall be the King's Remembrancer in Marken, Your Royal Highness."

CHAPTER EIGHT

JUST prior to the hour of the matutinal sausage in Marken, on the following morning, those who strolled sleepily out into the narrow streets and observed that the sun had been up several hours, found a topic for conversation. Notices had been posted in the night-time on the doorways of churches, lamp posts, and pillar boxes, and sometimes over the billboards where gay posters advised people to use Schmitt's soap; to feed their dogs on torox, or to drink that most soothing of all liqueurs, Ron Bacardi. Languidly these were read and a mild flutter ensued that caused many to forget—almost to forget—that the sausage hour was due.

The notices were printed in plain white, with plain type, and plainly stated that His Gracious and Benign Majesty, Karl II, King of Marken, by Divine Right, had, in the interests of the great kingdom, seen fit to exercise his august prerogative of forming a new ministry, in the confident belief that his subjects and the welfare of the state would thereby be benefited, Baron Matilda, etc., etc., Provarsk was now the chancellor of the realm, succeeding Baron, etc., etc., Von Glutz.

"Ha!" said those who read, gleefully. "The old pouter pigeon has got his wings clipped!" Or, "Baron Provarsk? What does this mean? Continually he has tried to make us believe that King Karl is a blunderer. Now he sides with the king and becomes chancellor. Ayya! Ahem! We shall see what kind of a chancellor this high and mighty baron makes!"

Baron Von Glutz now Minister of War!

At that they laughed a little and expressed pity for the few score men who formed the king's standing army. They hoped the new minister would not alter the uniforms, because those new scarlet tunics and white trousers, pricked out with profuse gold braidings, were very effective.

Captain Philidor Paulo to be Minister of the Treasury.

"Well! Well! Well! That's something. The common people are at last beginning to be recognised!" They were flattered. They remembered, some of them, what a merry lad he was when his widowed mother conducted the charcuterie in the Alley of the Capuchins. Pity she had not lived to see her son a cabinet minister! What a lot of money he would have to count. He always was good at counting, stoutly asserted some of the old dames who had watched his growth.

They discussed it vigorously while eating. They had placid disputes about it after the shops

opened; but they forgot it by bed-time. Affairs couldn't be worse than they had been, they decided, with that remarkable phlegm which has ever been Marken's most distinguishing trait, and let it go at that.

On the following day the shops had nice pictures of the new chancellor for sale, all of which had been left by a giant, "on commission," who was voted a queer sort of chap, inasmuch as sometimes he failed to hear, or at least declined to answer. This gave them cause for gossip, it being an innovation to thus advertise the face of the chancellor. They did not know that a more mystified person was the chancellor himself, who speculated vainly on what the fertile-brained King's Remembrancer could have "up his sleeve" in this latest divertissement, and not in the least suspecting that it was for the purpose of making his features so widely known that he could never run away.

The *Court Gazette,* that highly aloof official organ whose smallest paragraph was read with awe, proved the next distraction. It intimated that great changes were about to take place in the administration of the kingdom, all of which would tend to the aggrandisement of Marken, and would probably bring it into the rank of First Powers of the world; whatever that might be. Elderly gentlemen wagged their heads sagely,

and younger ones unconsciously swelled their chests as duly becomes citizens of one of the "Great Powers." The cautious ones hoped that Marken was not going to plunge the world into a war of conquest, and a village oracle who had once seen the Adriatic sea and declared that it was impossible to see across it because there was so much water, and who had for twenty years been discredited therefor as a notorious liar, arose again to prominence and sagely declared that he believed, after long deliberation, that Marken was about to have a navy of its own.

Then, after a week's excited argument, there appeared that memorable state announcement that it was the duty of all to support the state and that at the places named, on the dates named, all able-bodied citizens of both sexes would appear and register themselves; that failure to do so would be punished by fines, imprisonment, confiscation of property and various other humiliations. Also, God save the King! And this manifesto was signed by the new chancellor! This was carrying it too far! The idea of expecting people to do something for the state! Why, who ever heard of such a thing? Of course anything done for the state was wasted time. Didn't they pay taxes? Wasn't that enough? Things were coming to a pretty pass. Anyway, two weeks must elapse before the new conscription measures be-

came effective, and this, they decided, was ample time to consider so startling an innovation.

And innovation had been made in the palace itself, unknown to the placid, indolent citizens of the quaint old city that flowed in haphazard angles below the palace hill. The American, after effecting the organisation of the new cabinet, was the cause.

"Thank you for the invitation to make your palace my home, sir," he said to the king on His Majesty's formal re-entry into his ancestral home.

The king, astonished, inasmuch as he had never conceived, or voiced, any such invitation, answered with a whimsical smile not too unlike Kent's own, "Oh, it's nothing! Nothing at all, Mr. Kent. It was thoughtful of me, wasn't it?"

"Very," replied the new guest. "It was very kind of you, also, to suggest that inasmuch as a King's Remembrancer must be a mighty busy man, because a king has so much to think about, that I should select such rooms of the palace as would serve for business offices."

Thus he seized a reception room, overlooking the gardens, and a smaller room that was metamorphosed into his private office, and in a third a staff of bookkeepers was installed.

"It looks," said the king to Paulo, whilst making a surreptitious visit, "like a bank. What on earth can so many bookkeepers do?"

"Opening a new set of government books, Sire, under the direction of a London accountant to whom Mr. Kent telegraphed."

The king looked helpless and puzzled and said, "Weren't the old ones—Ummh!"

"Mr. Kent said all the old books were mere waste. Said he would put the accounts of Marken in such shape that he could tell each night exactly where the kingdom stood, or know the reason why."

"Incredible!" exclaimed the king. "No one ever heard of such a thing."

"That is what Baron Von Glutz told Mr. Kent."

The king grinned and his eyes lighted as he asked what Mr. Kent had replied.

"Mr. Kent asked the baron if he had ever heard that in America there were now large and thriving orchards of cheese trees, and when the baron answered that he had not, Mr. Kent said, 'There you are! You see there's a lot of things you never heard of. Every child in America knows as well about the cheese tree as every big corporation knows about the watermelon. Whenever possible, every big board of directors in America assembles in solemn conclave and cuts one."

The king looked as if he almost believed it; but did not disclose ignorance, having been carefully instructed on this point when a crown prince.

"Mr. Kent has retained one of the expert accountants sent him from London as his private secretary," Paulo added, as a further note of interest. "He speaks our tongue. Also, Ivan has brought all their personal belongings from Steinweg. Mr. Kent has also bought a strange sort of clock arrangement that he compels the chancellor and the Minister of War to punch in a curious fashion whenever they enter or leave their offices. Mr. Kent said he was thinking of getting one for Your Majesty. This curious device registers the time when one comes in or goes out, so that by referring to it, Mr. Kent says he can tell whether they are doing a full day's work."

His Majesty decided that it was time for him to retire to his own part of the palace. Mr. Kent seemed to be doing quite a lot of things. Among others, His Majesty learned a few days later, was the reorganisation of the working plant of the mining concession, effected by a distinguished mining engineer who had not only arrived but had telegraphed for new machinery that was to be installed. Also local engineers had been sent to make surveys and plans for electric power plants at several places where hitherto some noble waterfalls had been permitted to flow as nature made them, untrammelled by harness. Quarries owned and long neglected by the crown were being prepared for reopening on large scales, and the king

was further surprised when it was publicly announced that His Majesty, Karl II, was heading a scheme for the utilisation of some mineral springs, and would from state funds establish a spa that it was hoped would be second to none in Europe, where gout, rheumatism, Bright's disease and many other ailments would be promptly alleviated, or cured, under the supervision of famous specialists. The king wasn't sure that he liked it. The best he could hope for was that Kent would not have a picture of the king and His Majesty's personal guarantee on every bottle of water exported. And in the meantime, Mr. Kent, cause of all the disturbance, was happier than he had ever been in his life. He was the first in his office in the morning, and the last to leave at night. The dignity of the staid old palace was being rudely shaken by constant streams of those who came on business, were received by the square-jawed man who always explained that he was merely the king's mouthpiece appointed to transact whatever was to be done in this particular case, etc., etc., and——

"Sit down! Did you bring those plans? Well, skip all that! What's it going to cost? That's too much. Ought to be shaved by twenty per cent. Take those estimates back and go over them again. No use in your trying to fool the king, is there? You fellows around here have got to wake up. The

king has been studying over this affair, and knows what it ought to cost just about as well as you do. Bring the new figures around to-morrow at seven minutes past three o'clock. Good day!"

Like a Gatling gun that voice snapped and boomed all day long, and a close observer might have discovered that in the cafés of Marken by night, and in the Market Place by day, men began to speak of the king with something more than stupefaction, something bordering on fear and respect. "Who would have ever thought it?" they muttered and wagged. "No one ever expected him to do any more than any other king does!" And, "Where on earth would he get workmen for so many enterprises?" Pessimists opined that the king was mad and the kingdom going to the dogs.

The days of the registration passed with good-natured tolerance. It was fairly good sport, the Markenites thought, quite like some foolish festival season. But why was it that when they registered themselves they were also given a physical examination and issued cards of different colours stating that they had been assigned to a certain class? It certainly did indicate that the king was preparing to go to war, and was therefore organising all his resources. The citizens of the toy capital of the toy kingdom were vastly perplexed, but not quite alarmed.

Secretly the new chancellor speculated on what

this bold alien expected of him, and suspected that the sole reason why he was compelled to keep office hours was that a watch might be kept over his activities. Secretly the new minister of war fussed and fumed. Secretly the king began to hope for the best, and secretly the Princess Eloise came to the conclusion that there were some characteristics of the redoubtable Mr. Kent that she could not understand. Fight as she would, she had to admit that he threatened to do things, exhibited no slovenliness of mind, and she could not help liking him for that.

And then, on a certain day, the curiosity of every one promised to be satisfied. Again the public announcements appeared, assembling all of classes A, B, C, and F, at certain central points, notably one in the Market Place of Marken, and now there would be but two weeks more of suspense.

CHAPTER NINE

IT was the morning of the day in which the announcements were to be made to the citizens of Marken that they had been conscripted for something far worse than war, namely work. Early in the day, as Kent had foreseen, Marken began to fill not only with those of the classes called, but with members of all other classes. Peasants, chattering volubly, poured into the capital, some on foot, others in carts, and all gaily clad in their best garb. There was an expectant and serious air pervading everything, the people themselves, the quiet old palace, the very trees of the streets and the flowers that lent colour to window sills and tiny patches of open gardens. The American was early at his desk, and was never more methodical and energetic. This he recognised as a crisis. People, he knew, could be asked to go to war and would go cheering; but to ask them to go to work was an entirely different and more serious request. They might rebel. All that foresight could suggest had been done. The standing army, the first and second reserves, had all been called out and posted in various places

where trouble might occur, and Baron Von Glutz, faithful to orders and ever willing to do his best, had puffed, and sweated, and bellowed commands that all might be prepared to quell disorder.

Noon was the hour fixed, but already the town was filled. At noon they were to be told the worst!

Kent, referring to the lists on his littered desk, was jotting down figures, with an air of satisfaction, as if to reassure himself that he had made no mistakes in his estimates.

"A and B to the mines," he murmured. "That fixes them up. C men are carpenters and brick and stone layers, and there's enough of them to care for all constructions. And there are enough F men, all machinists, to look after the plants. Yes, that leaves plenty of common labourers for the quarries. Must call them up next."

From the window overlooking the palace gardens came the voice of Ivan: "The chancellor and his friend, the banker Wimplehurst, are walking in the gardens together," he said, and turned to Kent to see the effect of his words.

"By Jove! Is that so? I've been rather bothered about our friend the chancellor in the last few weeks," Kent said. "He's so uncommonly bright that I haven't been able to get a line on him."

He got up and came to the side of the window, caught the curtains in his hand to shield himself

from possible observation and looked through the meshes.

"Wonder what in the deuce that rascal has on hand now? It's something. Otherwise he wouldn't have selected the garden for the meeting. No place like a garden or a crowded street to keep from being overheard. He's afraid that walls have ears like an elephant's. And so they have; under my especial provision," he added with grim humour.

He suddenly turned and hastened to his desk, pulled open a drawer and handed a pair of binoculars to Ivan.

"Keep out of sight and tell me what they say," he ordered, after which he returned to his desk and quietly lounged over its corner with folded arms.

Ivan grinned, adjusted the glasses, focussed them at a conveniently thin place in the curtain design and began talking, disjointedly, as if to himself.

"Wish I could open these curtains. They bother me—when there's two hundred yards between us. Hard to read the lips unless they turn this way. Ah! They've stopped and I can see them both. Lucky that the banker is smooth-shaven and speaks distinctly."

He paused for a moment as if picking up the

thread of conversation that was being unwound across the wide, intervening space.

"It seems that Provarsk has arranged with the banker to get together a certain number of men to create a disturbance when the announcements are made. Provarsk thinks enough fuss can be raised to stop your conscription scheme. The banker doesn't want it to go as far as open revolt. Provarsk laughs. Says what if it does. Banker says that part is up to Provarsk. Provarsk hopes that the centre of unrest and objection being the capital, it will spread out into the country. Says he knows your affairs are critical, and that if you are beaten in this, you'll either have to give up or try something else. Banker's men are to be posted around different spots in the Market Place. Provarsk wants to know how they are to act unitedly. Banker says he will get up close to the stand where the announcement is to be read, then, when he thinks time is right, will get up and give signal. That immediately a riot will start. Says all his men know one another by a red cockade in the left buttonhole. Provarsk wants to know if the banker followed his instructions and confined his efforts to Marken, because he thinks concentration here is important. Banker says yes, all are to be at Market Place. Banker says had to pay men four dollars each in advance. Wants Provarsk to pay him back. Provarsk

smoothing banker down with promises. Tells him he's to be Minister of Treasury some day and not too many questions asked. Banker appears satisfied. The baron has an idea——"

He was interrupted by Kent, who had arisen, walked behind him and now took the glasses from his hand and said, "Never mind the remainder. I've only got an hour in which to move. Go and get Paulo and bring him back with you on the jump! And, hold on a minute! As you go out to get him, order my car brought around and kept in waiting at the private door. Also, as soon as you've brought Paulo here, don't wait, but skip over to your room and arm yourself, and bring a gun for me. Just as well be prepared. Hurry, Ivan! We've got quite an uncertain job."

After Ivan had rushed from the room, he dawdled back toward his desk, stood above it for a moment, carefully sorted the lists and papers, and then, with hands in trousers' pockets, sat on the corner, swung his leg, and carelessly hummed a tune as if perfectly satisfied with all things. Only his eyes betrayed any excitement, and they danced as happily as those of a boy just starting on some wild adventure. But when Paulo, eager to be of service to this leader whom he trusted and admired, came through the door, he lost no time in beckoning him to his private office where he leaned forward and mumbled hasty instructions, check-

ing them off on his finger-tips, and having them recapitulated to make certain of their intelligent understanding. He was quite gleeful when Paulo ran from the room, calling back, "Leave it to me, Mr. Kent. You can depend on me."

He consulted his watch, saw that it lacked but half an hour of noon, and locked his desk and twirled the knob of his private safe. He clapped his hat on his head, and whistled merrily as he closed the office door after telling his secretary that he would not return until late in the afternoon. He was exactly like any other American business man as he walked alertly to his waiting car, smiled at Ivan, and told the driver, another man on whom he could depend, to make his way to the Market Place. He lighted a cigar and puffed it vigorously as the car swung out of the palace gates and with shrill warnings made its way toward the centre of that day's attraction.

In the outskirts of the crowd the car was stopped by an officer who, on seeing the palace uniform worn by the driver, was prepared to give the car right of way. The American dismounted.

"Permit this car to stand here at the side where we can reach it when we return," he said. "Clear a way and conduct my man and me to the platform where the announcement is to be made. I am on the king's business."

"I recognised you, sir," said the officer respect-

fully, and at once called to two of his men and began conducting them forward. The crowd swayed, commented, and drew back leaving a free lane down which they pasesd. Gay it appeared with all the colours of the rainbow, a strange motley of gorgeous hues now that the holiday costume was donned. Under their feet the rounded cobbles, polished by many feet for many ages, were littered with broken flowers, tinsel from sweetmeats and confetti. Any great gathering in Marken betokened a holiday, sacred or secular, and habit could not be overcome in a day. At the foot of a grey old tower whose clock, daintily veiled with ivy, stared down at the assemblage, a stand had been erected; for here, from time immemorial, had been read the king's commands. It was always the same scene. First the waiting crowd, then the king's heralds brilliantly clad, the shrilling of silver trumpets, the silence, sometimes murmuring, sometimes breathless and expectant, as befitted the gravity of the situation, while some person of state shouted in long-drawn, deliberate tones the king's decree. Always it closed with the same statement, that confirmation would be found on the printed announcements hereafter to issue and "God Save the King!" Sometimes they had approved. Sometimes they had looked at one another sullenly, or humorously, and asked what God should save him for, being a

little in doubt on that point, and finding no sufficient reason of their own. Legend said that away back in distant times, some of their kings, a very few, being those who could read, had in person bawled their own decrees. But that had been a long time ago, and—well—the ways of God's anointed were sometimes incomprehensible to those of meeker mould. An unexpurgated history, now suppressed, declared that Ferdinand First while addressing his loyal subjects had fallen over the platform rail because at the time he happened to be drunk; but none dared criticise a king lest, being God's chosen, one commit sacrilege. It was too much like scratching one's head when reading the Poet Laureate's poem dedicated to "Princess Ann Elize on Her Sixteenth Birthday," which called her fairer and more divine than all the angels ever before loaned direct from Heaven, when one who had seen her knew that she had a face like an oyster shell, with a pendent lower lip, and drooled when, straining her intelligence to its limit, she talked about the weather.

Kent reached the platform and saw one of his own men there, clad as a king's crier. The man looked like a cross between haughtiness and an attack of fever and ague. Kent thanked the officer, climbed to a back seat on the tiny platform and stared over the crowd below. He observed, with satisfaction, that here and there in this crowd

there were tiny swirls and lanes like those of cross currents in a sluggish stream, and that every now and then an automobile at the extreme edge of the pool appeared to have been granted a burden, and dexterously whirled away.

A gun boomed from an old fortress that stood sentry above the market place. The old clock in the tower began a ringing of cracked and ancient chimes. A wooden crusader clumsily carved, and riding a clumsily carved figure presumed to represent a horse, went rocking around a circle with creaking jerks, met a similar wooden monstrosity, passed from sight, and a toy rooster opened a door and crowed as if to impress those below with the fact that he had a serious bronchial affection, or had lost part of his crow. Another effigy supposed to carry the colours of Marken creaked around the circle, and the official announcer got to his feet, and made his way to the front of the platform.

"In the name of his gracious majesty, Karl II, King of Marken, Duke of the Trentheim, Baron of the Oberwald," etc., etc., he announced and began reading the decree, which, stripped of the whereases and wherefores and constant references to Divine Right, bluntly told the citizens of Marken the appalling truth—that they would have to go to work.

In the horrified silence it was explained that a

state form of conscription had been evolved, not for the purpose of bearing arms, but that workers might be obtained for the conduct of various state enterprises, the profit therefrom to be derived by the state and applied to the payment of its debts and upkeep; that ultimately the citizens themselves would receive that profit after the state debts had been paid, and that the new form of taxation, that imposed by the work of their hands, would abrogate all others. Furthermore, it was announced that certain factories and public utilities were to be commandeered and in future operated by the government acting over and legitimately protecting the original owners. The voice of the announcer closed with its "God Save the King," and he took his seat.

There had been attentive silence while he read. Out there in the clear noon, under the clear blue sky, the Markenites listened, and struggled to comprehend. And then an abrupt murmur arose to become in a moment a roar, and the American sitting stolidly and listening attentively, caught an undernote that threatened anger; so without a moment's hesitation threw himself forward to stem the tide before it got beyond control. He signalled to the trumpeters and shouted, "Blow! Throw your lungs into it! Quickly! Blow!"

Obediently the two men trumpeted for attention. Kent had jumped across the platform and

shouted into the announcer's ear: "Tell them the king has sent his agent to explain what the new conscription amounts to!"

In his gorgeous uniform the announcer again stepped to the front between the trumpeters, gestured them to stop and raised his hand for silence.

"Hear Ye! Hear Ye!" he called, and paused until the silence was absolute. "That His People may understand, His Majesty the King has sent to you his personal agent to explain more fully than could be done by royal decree the objects and effects of the new law. Give heed to the king's mouthpiece!"

Kent came forward and studied his audience, that waited ominously.

"Listen to the king's desire," he said, in his big, resonant voice that swept over their heads and through the Market Place. "His Majesty has but one wish, to make Marken and Markenites respected and prosperous. He wishes to make the title of Markenite, all over the world, a proud synonym for honesty, industry, and prosperity."

He paused a moment with his shrewd senses alert, and decided that he was on the wrong track when he tried to arouse them to patriotism. Instantly his facile imagination adopted another course, and a momentary sneer flickered over his lips as he shifted to demagoguery, the fine old method used from the days of Rome to the days

of the present, forever effective, and invariably ephemeral, but potent for a crisis such as this.

"The king has studied the situation. He believes that the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer, and that the great throbbing honest frame of mankind is about to be crucified on a cross of gold! Down with the trusts! Give the honest, horny-handed son of toil a chance! One man is as good as another and better. E Pluribus Unum! Multum in Parvo! Who is to blame? said His Majesty the King, after years of study. And then like seeing a great white light he understood. It was because these who had riches no longer worked but devoted themselves to idle luxury and looked down upon the real Markenites, those who, with rugged arms, sweat-stained brows, and hopeless eyes looked up to the Heavens and cried in patient agony, 'How long, Oh, Lord, how long!' Ground beneath the heel of the octopus wealth those who had nothing saw about them many who had much, but saw no way of getting any of it. 'Many of my beloved people,' said the king, 'produce nothing and will not work with their hands, whilst their brothers till the fields from rooster crow to nightingale's song for a mere pittance. I want,' said the king—the great sorrowing king of this imperial realm, 'to know that the workingman's dinner pail is full!' That is what he said."

He paused and saw with satisfaction that his words were having effect. He went them one better. He lowered his voice to a tone of pathos, rolled his eyes upward, shook his hands up at the clear blue sky and said in a still more impressive silence, "I would that you could have seen that great king that governs us all, Karl the Second, whose name shall pass down through all ages, immortal, enshrined in the tender memories of men, as he stood with great pitiful eyes suffused with unshed tears and cried, 'The salvation of my people lies in that simple thing, the full dinner pail! And that this may come about there is but one way, that all men shall work, produce, develop, and do their share. The richer the plutocrat, the more he should do. The poorer the man, the more opportunity he should have to become independent among his fellows. Therefore each and all shall work as his or their abilities seem fitted. There shall be no more starvation wages. Some wages shall be increased by the hundred fold, and others in proportion. The man who now earns but a kroner a day shall have two kroners. The rich man shall work with his brothers and actually earn the same.' Thus spoke His Majesty. The gracious king will see that work is forthcoming, and the gracious king will see that no one in all this broad land shall go hungry to his humble couch whilst others who have heretofore prospered

beyond their deserts, shall with full bellies rest between silken sheets."

He paused dramatically, and lifted his hands above his head, crossed in a peculiar manner, and instantly a wild cheer broke out that began in a singularly scattered way, but was so insistent that the people themselves took it up at last and roared loudly, "God Save the King! Long live the King!"

Kent, discerning the same sort of frenzy that prevails alike in negro camp-meetings and Madison Square political meetings, where individuals yell and shriek principally because the men on either side are setting the example, played another fine old oratorical trick by furiously bawling for silence and gesturing appeals, polite requests, and commands.

"No man dares speak against the king's wish," he roared, as if intent on being heard by some one across the Atlantic ocean, "because his intelligent and wise fellows will understand, at once, that such an objector is a disgrace to the name of manhood, an obstructor to progress, a rebel at heart, and, worst of all, one who would trample under foot the grand and noble flag of labour, that sacred standard that has been followed, defended and died for since time began, that symbolises the glory of honest toil!"

Again he made that peculiar gesture, and this

time the cheers were hysterical in volume and mingled with them was the roar of firearms as a group of soldiers stationed at the side of the Market Place, in obedience to a command from their officer, fired a blank salvo in the air. A man stationed in the tower banged the cracked bells and lashed them up to a fine imitation of joy. Men and women hugged one another. Dogs howled. Children shrieked with excitement, and the quaint old buildings surrounding the Market Place rocked and trembled with the universal ecstasy that intoxicated the Markenites now that they had been plainly told what a wonderful king was this that had come to lead them to universal riches, and, therefore, to such a state of plenty that they could buy anything in sight, eat the best there was to be had and patiently look forward to an earthly paradise where nobody at all had any work whatever to do.

The King's Remembrancer turned and winked slyly at Ivan and voiced silently the cryptic remarks made by many another renowned orator, when closing a successful campaign speech, "Guess that'll hold them for a little while. Come on! Let's beat it!"

Like a stern conqueror, with head erect and steady eyes he moved slowly through the lane that opened wide to give him egress. He seemed not to hear the shouts of approval, or the cheers of

those who paid him adulation as the one who had spoken for the king. Only once he halted in this triumphal progress, when his eyes fell on a puffed-up and self-important contractor with whom he had become acquainted and whom he thoroughly detested for his garrulity. To him he extended his hand and spoke. The little man swelled visibly at being thus recognised by the great man, and was gratified that so many could see this evidence of friendship.

"The people understand," murmured Kent, confidentially. "The king told me they would, because he could always trust to their good sense; but His Excellency, the Chancellor, will be furious; because you see he wanted the king to lower all wages, and not compel any of the rich ones to work. The chancellor, born to a golden spoon, I am afraid hates the honest sons of toil. Trust the king to set him in his place if he goes too far!"

He gave a lugubrious shake of his head, again shook hands very warmly and hastened onward.

"One for you, Provarsk," he said to himself. "Before I've got out of this square that fat gas bag will pass it around with exaggeration and my worthy little chancellor won't dare travel without a guard for some time, I reckon. Hope they don't catch him and hang him on sight!"

CHAPTER TEN

IN the precincts of the palace, on that eventful afternoon, there was considerable apprehension sustained by the king, who, born to precedent and hedged in by conventionalities, believed in doing all things slowly and with decorum. As Kent once said, he was "As fine a watchful-waiter as ever succeeded in ponderously doing nothing." Indeed there was but one person visible after Kent's hasty departure for the Market Place who did not seem anxious, that person being the chancellor himself. He strolled languidly into Kent's office within three minutes after the American had passed out, and looked for the King's Remembrancer. Not seeing him, he smiled slyly, took a seat, waited a few minutes, and then rang the bell that summoned Kent's secretary. That astute and well trained young gentleman entered the room and stood like a statue of respectful attention.

"Good morning, Your Excellency," he said, while in the back of his brain ran the question, "Wonder what that pusillanimous blighter wants in here at this time?"

"I should like to speak with Mr. Kent," announced the chancellor.

"I regret to say, sir, that he is not in at present," replied the secretary, with due deference. "Any word which Your Excellency might——"

"When will he be in?" curtly interrupted Provarsk.

"Probably not until late this evening," was the calm response.

"Where is he?"

"I rather think, sir, that he has gone to inspect some new work over at the mines," deliberately lied the secretary, but with a convincing air of innocence and candour that proved his worth as either a secretary or a witness before a congressional investigating committee. He stood at ease, still with that air of deference, but noted that the chancellor, after a moment's thought, was undoubtedly pleased. His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of the king, who came in with more than usual haste. Provarsk instantly stood to his feet; but the king took one glance at him and frowned in lieu of greeting.

"Your superior—where is he?" demanded the king, addressing the secretary.

"He is not in at present, Your Majesty," promptly responded that worthy.

The king was undoubtedly anxious. A certain nervousness of demeanour expressed it.

"That is just what I was asking, Cousin," airily interjected the chancellor.

"Suppose you stop 'cousining' me," the king said, eyeing him with no attempt to conceal his dislike. "Besides, I don't know what you had been asking. Few people ever do."

With undisguised enjoyment that he had succeeded in exasperating the king, Provarsk smiled and flicked his fingers.

"Oh, tut! tut!" he said. "What I had just remarked was that I thought it very discreet of Mr. Kent to remove himself on such a momentous day. To take to the woods, I might say, lest a storm arise."

The king turned his back and walked toward the door leading out to the hanging balcony, where he stood gazing off toward the city. Not in the least disconcerted, Provarsk added, with mock gravity, "I even told him that affairs were critical and that perhaps the power of the throne itself had been cast on an issue of extreme doubt."

"That must distress you terribly," remarked the king, with a sneer in his voice.

"Ah, good morning, Your Royal Highness," Provarsk said with great heartiness, and the king turned to discover that his sister had entered the room and was now facing Provarsk with a cool stare.

"Karl," she asked, "is it true Mr. Kent still

insists on forcing his wishes through to the very utmost? That enforced labour measure?"

"So far as I know," moodily replied the king.

"And aren't you afraid that——" she paused and looked at Provarsk, who declined to depart without direct orders.

"Afraid of what?" the king asked in a tone of irritation.

"Afraid there will be trouble," calmly interjected Provarsk. "That is what the Princess Eloise means. Afraid the people won't submit. And why should they? I wouldn't if I were one of them. You can give odds on that."

The secretary created a diversion by discreetly bowing himself backward to the office door and then through it, with the staid fervour of an automaton. The princess looked at her brother a polite request to order Provarsk from the room; but the king, through obstinacy, refused to heed it.

"You were about to say, Eloise?" he asked politely, as if the baron had not been present, and therefore had not impertinently added his voice to the conversation.

She had no time to answer; for at that moment there came from the distance a loud roar of many voices, and immediately after the sound of fire-arms in ragged volley. The effect on the king was as if some one had propelled him with a swift kick out to the balcony, where he gazed anxiously

in the direction of the city. The princess, distressed, also moved toward the balcony, while Provarsk grinned pleasantly and seemed to understand the meaning of the sound. He was confident that he alone knew all that was conveyed by that uproar. He rather hoped that enough Markenites had been killed and wounded to make his revolt a good one. He cocked his head intently to listen for further shots, heard the distant clangour of the bells in the city tower, and decided it must be an alarum, and then another noise became audible, the sound of some one hastily coming through the tiled corridors, and this latter noise perplexed him. It grew louder and more distinct, and both king and princess, hearing it, hastily re-entered the room. Stentorian puffs and wheezes were now accompanied by the ringing of boot-heels and spurs, and through the door galloped the Minister of War. He was in full uniform of his own proud design, and the red of his broad sash was no redder than the red of his face. His eyes protruded and were wide, and his hand was on his sword hilt. So fast had been his progress, and so intense his excitement, that for a moment he appeared unable to speak. Then he burst out, "Has any one seen Mr. Kent? Has any one seen Mr. Kent, Your Majesty? Oh, this is horrible. Horrible!"

"I regret to say, sir, that he is not in at present.

Any word which Your Excellency might wish to leave will be duly repeated," Provarsk said in admirable imitation of Kent's secretary, and then added, "My goodness! It's all fussed up, isn't it?"

"Everything is lost!" exclaimed the Minister of War, speaking to the king.

"What has happened?" asked the latter, quietly, confronting an issue that brought out his better and fighting qualities.

"Mr. Kent! He told me that he proposed to put the decree through regardless of anything and that if I had to fight, fight it would be; told me to have my army stationed at places named, but said he would be there and that I wasn't to give the command to fire until he told me to. Great crowd! People all excited and restless! Accidentally dropped my glasses and stepped on them! And I've lost the oculist's prescription."

"You're rattled!" said the king, growing still cooler now that he faced an emergency.

"So I am! So I am!" admitted Von Glutz, hastily. "But I couldn't see Mr. Kent anywhere and the crowd grew threatening. I asked if any one of my officers had seen him. No one had. I hurried here to inform him, and on the way I heard shots. It can mean but one thing; that, pressed to the limit, my soldiers have fired, and that Marken is in a state of civil war!"

He paused for want of breath, and the king clenched his hands and made as if to go to the front himself; then whirled and asked sharply, "If he told you to stay there in command of the troops, who is in charge now?"

"General Handers."

The king hesitated; but the princess asked stormily, "Did Mr. Kent say you were to kill the people if a disturbance resulted?"

Von Glutz in his turn hesitated, trying to recall his exact orders.

"On signal from him," he replied.

"Karl! Karl!" she called. "Something must be done at once! This will never do. You must act, regardless of your promises to this American. Now! This comes, you see, from your putting yourself into the hands of such a man."

Emboldened by her criticism of the dictator, Baron Provarsk thought he saw his opportunity and assumed an air of extreme honesty and distress.

"The princess is right!" he declared to the king. "It is time to cast off such an incubus before the kingdom itself has gone to the dogs."

The princess recognised his presence for the first time.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, regarding him sternly.

It nettled him to an unfortunate retort.

"I mean that the only way in which affairs can be straightened out is to at once counteract everything this fellow Kent has done, and if I had my way he would be taken out and shot before the day is over."

At his callous indifference to either justice or life, she gasped, and eyed him with a wide stare. Provarsk wondered if, in overlooking the complexities of a woman's mind, he had not made a mistake; but he was still daring to hope to turn the situation to his own advantage. "If I am to be an actual chancellor," he began suavely, but was cut short by the princess.

"Which, no matter what happens, you are not to be, and so of course is all useless to talk about! You would have Mr. Kent shot! You! Why, the worst blunders he ever made are sure to be better than the best things you have ever done. You have told what you would do if you had your way. Well, I'll tell you what I would have done if I had mine! I'd have you booted into the street and through the Market Place. Kent? Whatever else Mr. Kent is, he is a man. No matter if he has made mistakes, and is a money lender, and all that, he is still a real man and unafraid. Who are you, to talk about having him shot?"

She faced her brother as if her last contemptuous gibe at Provarsk had been her final one for him, and saw that her brother's eyes were

fixed on the door and that Von Glutz also stared in that direction with a look of relief. She also turned and saw that the American had entered the room and was now coming gravely toward her.

"I overheard Your Royal Highness," he said, "and I thank you for your defence. I had not hoped for so much and I am grateful—very, very grateful—for a friendship that I esteem as of great worth."

She was visibly embarrassed, and took refuge in a diversion.

"What has happened in the Market Place?" both she and the king asked in chorus.

"It's a terrible situation," wheezed Von Glutz.

Kent's eyes flickered as if he now understood the cause of the assemblage in his reception room.

"In some ways," he said; "but I don't see how I could have acted differently."

"Why didn't you——" began the princess impatiently, and then hesitated and looked at the king.

"Will the princess please finish?" the American asked. "I wish you would extend your friendship to the point of advice. What would you have done?"

"First of all, I should quell the riot. It comes from misunderstanding. There are no kindlier nor more amenable people, Mr. Kent, than ours. They should not have been fired upon at all."

He stood quietly to one side, listening attentively, as if all his own plans had been defeated.

"I don't see why we waste time talking now," the king declared, impatiently.

"Please, Sire, allow the Princess Eloise to proceed," Kent said. "Her suggestions might be valuable." He turned his face toward her and encouraged her by asking, "And what then? After the riot is quelled?"

"Then they must be dealt with kindly, but with resolute firmness. It will not do to seem to give in to them. They must be made to obey; but there can be a compromise of some sort, can there not? This new plan was too unexpected, too drastic. It would have been better to have prepared them gradually. That would have been my way, Mr. Kent."

She stopped in expectation of his defence, and gazed at him with sympathy and regret, as if wishing to assist him in any way she could now that his plans, all energetic, all hopeful, had gone awry. She had never by word, until this day, credited him with any virtues.

"Thank you," he said quietly, lifting his fine eyes to hers. "I applaud your firmness. It's like encouragement from a friend to hear you talk. But I think, after all, that my way was the best. Something abrupt and sensational had to be done to arouse them. I did it. It worked all right."

All in the room fixed him with looks of interrogation and suspense. The chancellor emitted a sarcastic, "You certainly did!"

"And now we've got a revolution!" grumpily muttered Von Glutz.

Kent was still watching the princess, and had opened his lips as if to explain the situation to her when Ivan came striding into the room, stopped and would have retreated when he saw those present, had not Kent halted him with a gesture.

"Well, Ivan," Kent asked, "have you got them all right now?"

"Yes, sir. Captain Paulo said to tell you that the last of them had been rounded up and that all of them are now in jail. Also that he had followed your instructions and ordered an hour of free refreshments in the name of the king. The Market Place is filled now with people singing the national air and shouting their heads off for His Majesty. They've wrapped a big banner round the clock tower that reads, 'At last we have a king in Marken. God preserve His Majesty, Karl the Second.' "

Kent calmly grinned at Provarsk, whose face had grown black as an August thunder cloud. The king looked bewildered and vastly relieved. Von Glutz exclaimed, "God help us! What does

it all mean?" and the Princess Eloise broke into a surprised and gratified smile.

Kent again faced Ivan and asked, "And by the way, did you learn what they have to say about our most noble chancellor, Provarsk?"

Ivan grinned broadly, and with marked enjoyment said, "Yes. Most of the things they said I can't repeat; but I should think it would not be very wise or safe for His Excellency, the Chancellor, to be seen without a good strong guard for a few days, or until this celebration blows over. On that point they dispute among themselves; some being in favour of tar and feathers, while the others insist on hanging."

"You remember of whom you are speaking!" roared Provarsk, betrayed into an unusual display of anger.

"If necessary," said Kent, eyeing him, "I'll see that you are handed over to the mob in the Market Place within the next ten minutes, and with the word that the king agrees with those who want to lynch you."

"You asked my advice a few minutes ago, Mr. Kent," the princess broke in with a malicious little laugh. "Let me offer it. Send him down there now, regardless of whether he has anything more to say."

Provarsk controlled himself and was again the polished, self-contained, and fearless man of the

moment. He brought his heels together and bowed very low toward the princess.

"To be hanged by Your Royal Highness' wish would be a happines to me," he said.

"Come! Come! We've had enough of this, it seems to me," said the king. "If Mr. Kent will but relieve our suspense by explaining what took place——"

"Very easily done," the American replied, with the utmost calmness. "I learned that a combination had been effected between a certain number of men to provoke a riot at what they believed a suitable moment. It was to be such a row that it might become a full-grown revolt. I therefore took measures to see that each one of these hired lambs was to be shadowed by a guardsman I could depend upon. The Princess Eloise will be delighted to know that these guardsmen consisted of former adherents of a petty baron named Provarsk, who have taken service under me personally. Money paid into an itching palm at regular intervals and in sufficient sums, does make some men loyal. These followers swear by me."

He did not look at the discomfited Provarsk, who affected an air of the utmost indifference and stared absently out toward the garden.

"So," Kent went on, "when the hired disturbers started their outburst each one was instantly clapped on the shoulder and carried away to a

nice, secure little place protected by iron bars. I gave the people a treat. Talked to them myself and was—ahem! received with marked enthusiasm. The firing you heard was prearranged by me. It was a salvo of joy fired with blank cartridges. The ringing of the bells was also arranged by me, to give due dramatic effect. The feeling of love for the chancellor was also stimulated by me. I pointed out that it was he who signed the harsh decree enforcing labour, and suggested that only the unswerving efforts of His Majesty, the King, had ameliorated what might have been a most heart-rending condition of toil. We turned the proposed revolt into a celebration of joy and enthusiasm for His Majesty, who is probably at this moment the best loved man in Marken."

The king threw off royal dignity, and impulsively tried to express his thanks, but seemed to have trouble with his throat.

As if to relieve himself from an embarrassing position, Kent suddenly swung round toward Provarsk, and fixed him with mocking eyes.

"By the way, Chancellor," he asked in a casual tone, "isn't the banker Wimblehurst a friend of yours?"

"It seems to me that I am acquainted with the gentleman," Provarsk replied, not in the least perturbed.

"Too bad! Too bad!" said Kent. "He was

the leader of the disturbers. He was the first one I had arrested and put in jail. To-morrow he shall be deported and all his property escheat to the crown."

"Dreadful person!" said Provarsk, with a slight grin.

Kent's eyes lost all mockery and stared harshly at Provarsk with an unmistakable menace.

"Take care, Your Excellency, lest you overwork and the cares of state become too great for your zeal. It would indeed be pitiable if you were suddenly compelled to join that estimable gentleman, your friend the banker, in an equally penniless state."

Provarsk did not waver. He sniffed disdainfully, and with the utmost politeness asked, "Am I to understand that this is a command for my departure?"

"Not at all! Why should it be?" Kent retorted with cynical courtesy. "Oh, no, indeed! You are too good a thing to lose sight of, my gentle chancellor. Why, do you know, you are the most interesting person I have met since the panic of 1903? It is almost unthinkable what might happen to Marken without your presence to guide the ship of state through the reefs of unrest. Also I'm making you popular; as popular as castor oil for a summer beverage."

He waved his hand deprecatingly.

"I am sure," he said, deferentially, "that Your Excellency will pardon, for speaking so feelingly, one who is, after all, but the King's Remembrancer."

"Quite so! Quite so!" retaliated Provarsk, with unbroken nerve. "Let us hope that it doesn't happen again. It's the first time I knew you had any feelings."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT was nearly three months later when the various steel manufacturers of the world were stirred and agitated by the announcement that the redoubtable John Rhodes had again been heard from and in a most unsatisfactory way. The manganese deposits, of which there were only two or three of any size on earth, had been secretly bought in, or concessions gained therefor, and word came from the blithe John Rhodes, dated from his London offices, that hereafter manganese would double in price. Steel manufacturers swore volubly, but the market went soaring. Some of the manufacturers used cables and wires to find out if that deposit which was said to exist in a dinky little kingdom called Marken, was open for sale, lease, or concession.

The replies provoked renewed profanity, inasmuch as they tersely said, "Nothing doing. Concession already held by John Rhodes. (Signed) Kent."

And the steel industry of the world threw up its hands in horror and was compelled to submit to unheard of prices for a commodity that was

indispensable for all manganese steel. Richard Kent, smiling plaintively in his offices in the palace, found much cause to feel well satisfied. He had "made good" with John Rhodes for life, for on his judgment John Rhodes was making "a killing." Kent could now see the way not only to repay Rhodes all the money advanced to Marken, but in addition thereto was enjoying himself to the uttermost in the development of his big machine of state enterprise.

"I've put Marken on the map, you can bet," he confided to Paulo. "A year ago mighty few people had ever heard of it. To-day it's known everywhere, and there's a nice crowd of kings here in Europe who have a hundred times more power, but who are sick with envy. Marken markets on manganese are quoted daily all over the world. That's going some!"

Daily, also, the American was giving the king lessons in finance that made that dreamer take a new interest in life. The state automobile no longer hooted over the drives, because the king was too busy poring over the books which Kent had caused to be opened for him. Kent assured the king that in due time he would be made into a first-class accountant. He also suggested at times that it would be a fine thing for Her Royal Highness to study stenography and typewriting so she could assist in confidential matters; but at this

the king drew the line. Paulo had already succumbed and become as busy an office man as any concern might wish, Von Glutz had been burdened with the department of highways and railways, and could be daily seen inspecting steam rollers and consulting with traffic officials, and the chancellor was the only man about the palace who was entrusted with nothing at all. It began to be rumoured that the king of Marken was due in time to make the distinguished Prince of Monaco look like a deuce spot in the financial world. Meanwhile, Richard Kent, hustling, scheming, sat like a spider in a den and pulled webs from morning to night, and remained the least-known man on the scene. The Markenites liked him and called him, familiarly, the King's Errand Boy, a title to which he made not the slightest objection. But the Princess Eloise was troubled.

Prior to that day in the palace when the throne seemed rocking on its stately legs, the American had striven for her friendship. She had disapproved of him with an intensity that she could not now understand. He had lashed her with gentle, ironical raillery; he had dared to command and subdue her; and then, after the day of her brave championship, when she had wished to be his friend and ally, he had cultivated a studious and aloof politeness. She could not decide which of her actions had caused this change. Surely

the man was big enough to fathom her distress and mental harassments in those times of upheaval! From a defiant dislike, she had been won to a grudging respect for his rough, direct methods. She felt that she merited forgiveness for the natural ignorance of one who had never before come in contact with an American, and particularly with such a one. She had come to forget that he was not of her own nationality, which but increased her resentment. She had learned to understand that this alien who came and went, obscure, unobtrusive, unassuming, had in him some marvellous quality of leadership and organisation that needed no trappings to give it dignity and power. And as the success of his methods became positive in realisation, she regretted opportunities, lost, for a better friendship and understanding, with and of such a character. There was embodied in him a strange, new and virile life, a capacity for achievement, that she decided must have been born of that strange, new and virile country from which he had sprung. All her life had been imbued with contempt for such a country, a country of crudities, a colossus with nothing to recommend it save resources and wealth, and now, in the presence of this man from that country, who adroitly twisted all things to his purpose, she felt peculiarly weak and useless. What was there about him, what mysterious qual-

ity, that enabled him to set a king at work like a bookkeeper, a former chancellor to hurrying over dusty roads to inspect a public work, and an ardent young soldier like Captain Paulo to the dry task of manipulating funds? She had, with a sense of shame, made pretexts to seek him in those offices that had become driving centres of effort, and sometimes she had surprised him at his work and, unobserved, seen him sitting stockily before a desk where there was a battery of telephones, batteries of push-buttons, and compact reference cards, and noted with admiration the crispness of his commands, and the ordered intelligence of his methods. Her brother had become this man's admiring slave, and appeared to enjoy with him a friendship that was constantly increasing in intimacy. She had looked across from her wing of the palace at late hours on those long summer nights, and when the shades were up and the windows open, seen them lounging together and heard them laughing heartily at their own comments. And, worst of all, her brother was amazingly improved by this contact, for now he moved with a confident air, as if no longer uncertain of himself. The improvement was not without another change that she was not certain she liked; for her brother no longer carried himself with the august dignity of a king; but had fallen to the American's carelessness of dress and dis-

like of functions. He forgot to change clothes several times a day and formed an affection for an ordinary sack suit, which, she observed with horror, was gradually bagging at the knees. Also, he had cultivated a blotch of ink on the inner sides of his first and second fingers, and was impatient when she spoke to him of this delinquency.

"We've got no time, Kent and I, to waste on pumice stone and perfume!" he declared at the table one evening when she reproached him.

And worst of all, he was eating like a workingman! As if he wanted no amenities and only food. Plain deterioration, she thought it. Also, his conversation had undergone a subtle change. He no longer talked of the standard topics of royalty such as the weather, reports from the last yacht regatta, and the court scandal of neighbouring kingdoms. Instead, he waxed enthusiastic over another electric power plant, of the possibilities of all taxation being remitted, owing to state prosperity, of old age pensions, and how a new way had been found to increase production and lower costs of this or that, by Kent. Always Kent! Kent did this, or Kent said that! Had to lay a cornerstone to-morrow for a new plant, because Kent thought it best. Beastly bore, but Kent insisted that he should do it because the people liked it. Kent ragged him because he laid the last one without enough ceremony.

"But the dignity of the throne!" she remonstrated, highly shocked by his confession.

"Hang all that stuff!" he retorted in vulgar slang, also learned from Kent. "The only thing that counts is what you are doing and how well you get it done. Kent said so, and I want to tell you, Eloise, that what Kent says is good enough for me to go by. We—how is it he says it in English?—We are making the old dry bones rattle!"

She affected contempt for these barbarisms and in distress sought that staid old gentleman, the Minister of War, for consolation; but here again she was rebuffed.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Von Glutz. "One can't attend to all things, Your Royal Highness. Of course none of us are as polite as we used to be. Haven't the time. No, indeed."

"There is time for civilities, isn't there?" she demanded hotly, and the red-faced old man became grave.

"Eloise," he said, "I trotted you and Karl on my knees when you were nothing but babies. I was chancellor under your father. Your grandfather used to pat my head when he met me in these gardens out here. Now listen! I want to tell you something. In all its history there has never been a Marken like this. It's a kingdom, now! It is going to be able to buy and sell a lot

of its neighbours. It's respected. It pays its bills. Its bonds are away above par—among the best in the world. If it wants more territory it doesn't have to go to war to get it. It can buy it, outright!"

He even slapped his fat, sun-tanned hand on his knee to emphasise his point, and added, "We were all mistaken. It took a Kent to show us how. He is a great man, Eloise, a very great man. The greatest that ever came to Marken. Why, do you know, I was angry when he used to call me a doddering old fool, and now I know he was right. I like it, I do!"

He threw his head back proudly and defiantly. He, the dignified stately old chancellor, admitted that he was pleased to be called a fool so long as it was this phenomenal alien who called him that!

She ended that interview by lifting her head in the air and passing from the room, and reddened with annoyance when she thought she heard from behind her a soft, chuckling noise. And then came the worst shock of all. The king had actually gone, with bag-kneed trousers, ink-stained fingers and all, accompanied by Kent only, into the city and attended an evening band concert in the Market Place. And most undignified had been the consequence; for the people, recognising him, had given him an ovation and with locked arms escorted him home to the very palace gates!

When, mortified, she had reproached him for this lack of dignity, the king had casually replied, "To the deuce with it! Say, I've got something that beats all that, and from now on I'm going every night I can find time. What I've found out is that the people like me. There was a baker down there, and his name was Pete; sort of a man of affairs, I think, who is on the city council, and he made a speech. In a café, it was, and I had to make a speech. Kent says that I did well. Says I've got them all buffaloed, whatever that is. Says I've got the makings, whatever that is, of a fine orator. And next week I'm going to a banquet given by the ironmongers' guild, and Kent says that after this when there's a decree to be read, he wants me to go and read it myself. He says I'm a—what is it that he calls it in English? Oh, yes, I'm a good mixer. Kent says I've got to learn how to get acquainted with every one, and yet keep my dignity. Says I must never let any one talk about state affairs, but that I must make them feel that they can come to me when they are in trouble. Says I can get them so that they would die to the man if I asked them to."

"What else did this wonderful Mr. Kent advise?" she asked.

"Said I must never permit any familiarity, but must make them feel that we are all working together to make Marken great; that as the head of

the state I am entitled to respect but that my acts as an individual are open to criticism; said I must learn to submerge myself, and make them think of Marken in the day-time, and dream of it by night. That I must make them proud of being Markenites above all things. That I must make them proud to say that they know the king personally, and earn the reputation of being a just king who could always be depended upon."

"Rank Democracy!" she exclaimed.

"All right. Call it that if you wish; but I tell you I am learning that the way to make men do things for me, is to make them do it because they wish to and not merely because I happen to be the king," he answered, with emphasis, and then she realised that the change had been greater than she had seen, and that her brother had thrown aside all the precedent that had made the dynasty a mysterious potency, because this money lender had shown a new way. She shuddered with apprehension when alone. She resolved to make further efforts to learn this strange man Kent, and if necessary check his aggressions. Something must be done. She had tried defiance with him at various times, and always been worsted. She had tried to approach him on a friendly basis and had been held aloof by his quiet politeness. She resolved to attack his reserve in a more subtle

way, by approaching him over ground that was indubitably his weak point.

And so it was that the American, in his private office one morning, was told that Her Royal Highness the Princess Eloise waited in the reception room. He responded at once and stood before her with his grave air of attention.

"Mr. Kent," she said, smiling up at him, "I have come on affairs of state."

He wondered, mentally, what this dispute could be about, but said courteously, "I am of course a Your Royal Highness' service."

His steadfast, calm aloofness bothered her.

"Why is it that you do not make use of me?"

"Make use of you? Make use—I scarcely understand."

"Yes, make use of me. I am the only one you do not employ. You have my brother converted to your creed. Baron von Glutz is working harder than he ever did in his life. Captain Paulo has no time for any one or any other occupation than his own affairs. I am the only one left out. Surely I am as much interested as any one, and surely there is something I can do. I came to learn what it is."

His face relaxed into a warm smile that was his chief charm, a smile that forever came unexpectedly, that displayed his firm white teeth, that brought little wrinkles to the corners of his clear

eyes. Then as if studying the face of a child, he looked at her with an odd kindliness and approval. She was the first to lower her gaze and could not understand why she suddenly felt like a small girl appealing to a very great man.

"Will you not be seated?" she asked and heard him obey. She did not look up until he began to speak, and there was nothing of ridicule, sarcasm, or raillery in his musical voice.

"There is much that you might do, Princess Eloise, if only you understood; but the barrier between a princess and her people, the common people, I mean, is—well—it's a mighty hard hurdle to take. I don't know much about such things. I wasn't brought up exactly as those of royal families are, you see. I graduated from a sawmill. Outside of lumber kings, and soap kings, and others of that sort, we haven't any kings in America. The way I look at the situation here is this. First we had to make Marken honest and prosperous. To do that we had to make people work, make them all get their shoulders to the wheel and shove in the same direction. That far we have got. Next, so that they may keep shoving for all they are worth, we have got to get closer and closer to them; got to make them loyal to Marken and its ruling house because they want to be so. People can be forced to do things for a while by law; but that wears off, sometime.

People don't have to be forced when they do things through respect and affection. They do them because they want to. Because it's natural for them to do so. Our task now is to win their affection without losing their respect. You could do some very good work in that direction. It would help, materially. It might, sometime, Your Royal Highness, avert a serious crisis."

"You mean?" she asked earnestly.

"I mean that in the past there has been too much royalty here and not enough people; that the time has come when a—let us say a very small place like Marken—must begin to wear its clothes differently. When its royal house must stop trying to ape the emperors and kings and czars of great and powerful nations; drop the royal splendour pretence, and begin to make itself a power in its own way, on new lines, and let all others think whatever they please and be perfectly indifferent to what they do think. You've got to forget that you are a princess, and try to make friends out there. Every one of those women working in the fields, every girl out there of your age, has just as many perplexities, and sorrows, and hopes, and ambitions as you have. They've got just as much right to live and to hope. Doubtless some of their sorrows and some of their hopes would seem ridiculous to you. Doubtless a lot of your sorrows and hopes would look equally ridic-

ulous to them. So, if you wish to help, and I know you do or you wouldn't be here now, you must go out among them and establish a new line, a common ground, whereon their difficulties no longer seem trivial to you, and yours no longer ridiculous to them. Find a way to rub shoulders with them. They'll not contaminate you. You'll make it a whole lot easier for them. Get to know their names. Help christen their babies. Learn to advise. Learn to accept advice. Make them feel that you are not only a princess, but a woman as well. Why, the proudest title any man ever had in my country, Princess Eloise, was given to a ruler when they commonly called him Old Abe. Everybody knew who Old Abe was. And the reason it was the finest title was because they gave it to him from their hearts! A nation fought when he asked them to. A nation wept when Old Abe died."

Some great pathos in his voice, unsuspected from such a man, some prodigious seriousness, impressed and subdued her as she listened. This was not the money lender. Here was one who had pulled the curtain from the alcoves of his mind, and exposed therein something so noble that it brought her, a princess, to her knees. A glimpse had been given her of a fair landscape beyond all that she had ever seen, fairer than she had ever seen, tenderly appealing, warmly alluring, like

unto the dream of Parsifal. A land through which she might not pass save through nobility of spirit alone. She was crushed by a sense of littleness, of unworthiness. The American had arisen to his feet and she felt his glowing eyes. She arose, confused by the swift tracery of her thought, and stood before him with bent head and hands clasped before her. She spoke, still under the spell of the dream invoked by his clear insight, but could only stammer, "I am trying—am trying, Mr. Kent, to see. And I understand, now,—and I don't blame you—why you despise me!"

Had she looked up, then, she would have observed the swift look of pain that swept across his face, and his struggle to hold himself in leash. Just for an instant, and then, curbed by his relentless will, it was gone, and he was merely the quiet, inflexible, and kindly man regarding her with serious eyes.

"I did not say that," he rebuked her. "You asked what you could do to help. I tried to help you. You must find the way. I can't. I don't understand women. And because of this, I have most always avoided them. I do know men. I've had to. I've made my way by knowing them. And after all, I may be mistaken in my ideas. Sometimes I think they are foolish; but it seems to me worth thinking over, Princess Eloise, and I've learned that by thinking hard enough, one can al-

most always find a way. I hope you can, because, you see, you could do a heap of good. This place we're in has no jobs for cripples or pygmies."

She glanced at him to reassure herself that he was not again mocking her; but saw nothing beyond the utmost candour in his look; yet she was secretly pleased to discover, with a woman's intuition, that he felt awkward and embarrassed. She proved merciful to him and to herself, by uttering a single sentence.

"Thank you," she said. "I promise to try."

He bowed deeply to her as she walked from the room without looking back and then for a long time stood with his hands in his pockets and glowered out over the roofs and spires of the city, dimmed and empurpled by the evening glow.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IT was spring again, and as if the change of weather or the indefatigable work of winter had worn him to laxity, Kent sat in his private office, for once idle. The king, wearing another business suit that had also assumed bags at the knees, came hurriedly in and closed the door behind him.

"Hello!" said the American, swinging around to greet him. "What's up? You look worried."

"I am!" was the king's reply, as he threw himself into a chair and wiped his brow. "I've got the worst of news."

"Where did you get it?" asked Kent, with a grin that the king did not return.

"Down in the village," he said. "Two or three of the men I have made friends came to warn me. I listened and came back here as quickly as I could to talk it over with you. Provarsk has been undermining us again."

Kent's eyes twinkled and he settled back into his chair and lighted his pipe.

"Is that so!" he exclaimed, without excitement. "Well, what do you think you ought to do about it?"

"Do? I can't do anything without your consent, and you won't give it. I wanted either to have him tried for conspiracy against the state, or throw him out of it, two months ago. You wouldn't consent. You said something about giving the calf rope enough to hang itself, and did all you could to assist him by gradually giving him more power."

"Well, has he hanged himself yet?"

"Hanged himself? Of course not. He's trying to have us hanged."

"How?" asked Kent with that same air of quiet enjoyment, that did not at all please the king.

"By surreptitiously making the people discontented. He has them believing that working the mines the way they do is an injustice; that from the mines I am getting rich; but that all the other state institutions are scarcely paying at all. It's useless to tell them that they are all profitable——"

"Save one," slyly interjected Kent. "That state bath house is a complete failure. It has required all the means at my command to keep people from knowing it. The mineral springs turned to salt more than six weeks ago."

The king showed his surprise.

"Well, then—why—why didn't you close the place up? I didn't know that."

"True," said Kent, with the same easy de-

meanour. "I don't suppose you did know it. I haven't told any one, and there's not a man working there who isn't a confidential employé of mine. I had reason."

"But we have made money out of all the other state enterprises?" asked the king, anxiously.

"Out of every one of them. Marken, whether it wants to be or not, is due to become one of the richest nations, per capita, in the world."

He laid his pipe to one side, and leaned toward the king in a brisk business attitude.

"Listen," he said, "and I'll tell you what it means. The time had come to eliminate Mr. Provarsk. The very reason we kept him here in the first place was to give him either a chance to make good, or to fix him so that he would be forever harmless. Well, we've had to take steps to do the latter."

The king shook his head and said, "I don't see how."

"When we opened up the state enterprises, we permitted any one to buy stock in small blocks, didn't we? We held control only. Provarsk tried to bribe my secretary to give him inside information as to what ones would be the most promising, and to which ones we would give the greatest state support. My secretary told me. Already I had decided to drop the mineral water resort project because it couldn't be made to pay. I had my sec-

retary take Provarsk's bribe, and then tell him that the mineral water company was to be our biggest winner. Provarsk, through straw men and in divers ways, bought and bought until every dollar he could rake and scrape is in the venture. He owns forty-nine per cent of a project that isn't worth ten kronin on the minute that the state support is withdrawn and the reasons made public. Now do you see it all?"

"No, I don't," admitted the king thoughtfully. "What has that to do with a fresh disturbance among the people?"

Kent laughed, amused at what he regarded as the king's denseness.

"Why, just this. He expects to arouse the people to a point where they will demand a big share in the profits of all enterprises. Perhaps the absolute relinquishment of state control and ownership. Then those who hold the controlling stock in the best enterprise will find themselves rich. He thinks he has the best one."

"Pshaw! You haven't understood me," declared the king soberly. "I said that he aims his efforts at the mines."

"Quite true," replied the American. "In that way he kills several birds with one stone. He thinks that he upsets my house of cards on one hand, and builds his own with the other. Also, he embarrasses you because he knows that you

dare not tell the people of Marken that you have given John Rhodes a concession for these mines, and that, although they have been getting big pay, they have been enriching you, as well as paying back John Rhodes' money. The people themselves have been helping to do it."

"Can't agree with you quite!" stubbornly insisted the king. "Why, the men who work there are getting double the wages, and sometimes quadruple, that they ever before had in their lives. They are prosperous—prosperous beyond any hope that any of them ever had. You don't mean to say that prosperous men are the ones to revolt?"

"Nothing more certain in the world! Too much prosperity is just the same, if not worse, than too much poverty. An autocrat, I have come to the conclusion, can make, with fair luck, either one or the other; too much wealth or too much poverty. And the end will always be the same—they will get rid of the autocrat, who is the most obsolete being on God Almighty's earth. There are times when one seems a necessity; but the moment that necessity vanishes, so does he. Three very great nations in this world proved it, Great Britain, France and the United States. Sometimes I think the others don't count!"

"But we must stop Provarsk!" insisted the king, desperately.

"You leave Provarsk alone. He is doing just exactly what I foresaw, and what I want him to do."

For a moment they stared at each other, and the king was vexed.

"Come," said Kent seriously, "haven't I accomplished nearly everything I have undertaken? Have you lost by my suggestions? Think it over a minute, friend, before you reply."

The king did. Then, as abruptly it all recurred to him, his own desperate condition when first he met this man, the startling innovations, the progress they had made, their friendship, and above all, the strength and independence that this alien had taught him, he was ashamed of his own doubts. He made frank confession.

"Kent," the king said, "I'm still a—what you call—a chump!"

"Nothing of the sort," remonstrated the American. "You're all right! Only you don't do things the way I do, and I think that when it comes to handling rogues, my way is better than yours. Now see here! This is what is going to happen. I am going to make our choice chancellor believe that he has it all his own way. Going to give him a lot more authority. Going to be blind and deaf, apparently. Don't you interfere. I'll let you know when I want you. Let him stir up his revolt. It can take but one course, that of

demands, because it is far too late for him to dare to do anything against Your Majesty, personally. Why, if he harmed a hair of your or your sister's head, or suggested such a thing, they would take him down into the centre of the Market Place and burn him at a stake! And when the demands come up, it's got to be up to you. You've either got to give or refuse, and may Heaven help you if you blunder. I shall decline to advise you. The time will then have come when you must act for yourself and be your own advisor."

An hour later the king, with an anxious but resolute look, made his way to his private dressing rooms to prepare himself for a court reception in which he was to be invested with a decoration from a neighbouring monarch who, hearing of the wealth of Marken, was on the eve of asking for a loan and also opening negotiations leading to a marriage between his eldest son, the crown prince, and the Princess Eloise.

Also Provarsk, who had accidentally met the King's Remembrancer in the corridors, was being complimented by the latter on a manifesto that the chancellor had issued without authority and told that, inasmuch as all old hatchets had been buried, there was no reason why the chancellor should not really assume more power and do what he could to assist in the nation's welfare. Provarsk smiled gleefully when he left the King's

Remembrancer; likewise the King's Remembrancer smiled. They met once more that day, when in the palace gardens the chancellor, self-confident, came upon Kent and the Princess Eloise. He paused to pay her his respects, which she accepted with cool politeness.

"I learned a few days ago that Your Royal Highness had joined the others of us in the efforts for the good of the kingdom—er—got money to build a hospital for women, or something like that. Subscription lists all closed, Grand Hurrah, and all that."

"So?" she retorted in a calm drawl. "You are as nearly correct as one could expect. I haven't joined an effort, because I have made the effort. It is true that there is to be a hospital, but not true that its cost was raised by subscription. I am building it out of my own private funds and the women of Marken have gratefully agreed to support it."

He laughed tolerantly.

"Oh, they're grateful, all right—for anything they can get for nothing."

An angry retort was on her lips, but she caught a warning look from Kent and remained silent. Disappointed in his failure to exasperate her, Provarsk took a fling at the American.

"Your methods are much better, Mr. Kent.

You make them earn what they get and at the same time take good care to get yours."

"To be sure I do!" Kent agreed heartily. "That is your great weakness, Baron, your philanthropy. You should take a lesson from me, and learn how to get your own profits first."

"I am trying to prove an apt pupil," the chancellor responded. "I've always wanted money. You have taught me several ways of getting it."

"Quite possible," declared Kent, almost with enthusiasm.

Provarsk pleaded the necessity for greeting some one, and after a very low bow to the princess, and a light salute to the American, sauntered away. She stood with a frown on her face and watched him. Kent, after a moment's wait, laughed quietly.

"Isn't he fine?" he asked. "I rather like that chap. If he could only run straight, he might go a long way. He's got the assurance of a pet Tomcat, the persistence of a flea, and I don't believe he knows what fear is."

"I hate him!" exclaimed the princess.

"That never pays. It's a waste of time," he declared; and then suddenly shifting the subject, said, "Will you permit me to congratulate you on your hospital plan? It is something that has been needed here. I have been watching your work. You have done as I thought you might—

found that common ground between the women of the kingdom and yourself. And you have done it alone, and unadvised. I am afraid you were a little too liberal, though. It must have strained your private resources."

"Strained them?" she said, and then laughed softly. "It did more than that, Mr. Kent. But I didn't want to do it by halves, and the more I thought over it, the more I became enthused, and —there we are!"

"Was it worth while?" he asked, quietly, and staring at her profile that, against the darkness of the foliage, looked pale under the swinging fête lamps above them.

She turned toward him in a frank outburst.

"Yes! More than worth while! And I owe this new world of mine to you. I started badly. I must tell you, to be really honest, that I came to you that day through pique. I saw that you permitted nearly all the others to be friends with you, but barred me out. I wanted to be your friend, too. I couldn't come to you as the others had, because I had insulted you. And Mr. Kent, if you knew half how much I suffered, and despised myself, for my insolence and rudeness, I think you would take pity on me, and forgive."

"I have nothing to forgive!" he declared, stoutly. "You said nothing more than the truth. You called me a money lender. I am. You said

I came here to keep John Rhodes from losing his money. I did. Neither of us should be ashamed of the truth."

"But what of all the other things you have done?" she asked, curiously.

"The others don't matter. I have advised your brother as best I could because I liked him. He has very fine ideals. He has become a good king, and in time will become a great one. It was in him all the time; but he needed some one whom he trusted to give him plain horse-sense, and shape him to practicability. I don't really see how I could have acted differently."

"He gives you far more credit than you take," she said. "I think sometimes I am a little jealous of you. He talks of you so much. His enthusiasms are so great. He has changed so much. You and his work have absorbed him, and I am neglected! Treated like a child. No longer advised with or consulted. They all treat me that way, now! Not even Baron Von Glutz, or Paulo, can spare me a minute's time. I want to be something more than a doll baby in the affairs of Marken!"

"You are," he assured her, earnestly. "They recognise the part you have undertaken. They believe it as important as anything they are doing. You must not bother them. Keep a stiff upper lip and hoe your own row well!"

The princess gasped. It was the first time she

had ever been told to keep a stiff upper lip. And, strangest of all, she enjoyed it. She began to understand, dimly, that in his attitude was no disrespect, but a mere intolerance for forms to which she had been accustomed, and that he bent his neck to no one, not through stubbornness, but because it was habitually held in complete independence. Once she had heard him remark that he was just a plain American, and that "the woods were full of his kind over there." Perhaps that accounted for his fearlessness, she thought, as she pictured all those Americans running through primeval forests and fighting red Indians.

She was annoyed when her duties as hostess called her back to the brilliantly-lit palace from which the music of the guards' band came seductively through the windows, and where she must appear and talk court platitudes with very gallant gentlemen in uniforms, who somehow never seemed to have much worth while to say.

It was nearly two weeks later when she again sought Kent, and this time she was in a state of angry alarm. She did not wait to be announced, so urgent was her haste to speak to him. She scarcely took time to respond to his friendly greeting.

"I've got news! Terrible news!" she exclaimed desperately. "It was told me by three different women, wives of men who work in the mines. Pro-

varsk is stirring up a revolt on the new lines. He is encouraging the men to demand a share in the profits of the mine, and leads them to believe that if they can win this step, they can get anything they want."

She paused for breath, and was surprised that her news had so little effect on the American.

"Thank you," he said, "for coming to tell me about it; but I knew it already."

"And you are calmly letting him go ahead with this vile campaign?"

She could not understand such complacency.

"Yes," he said. "In fact I am surreptitiously encouraging him. Want to see just how far he can go. Things have been rather dull around here lately. Provarsk promises some entertainment."

He stared at the floor and his face softened by thought.

"It's great!" he declared before she could find speech. "Positively great! I knew you had it in you. By Jove! I knew it."

She feared that something had grone wrong with his mentality and with an anxious, bewildered question strove to bring him back to realities.

"What do you mean? Great? I was talking of Provarsk's treachery."

"I mean," he said, slowly and unreasonably embarrassed, "that you are great. Why, just

think of it, Princess Eloise! You were told the news by the wives of three men who work in the mines! Don't you see how you have won them—the wives of the men who work in the mines? Would any of them have done so six months ago? Did any of them, six months ago, care enough for you, the royal princess, to be alarmed when anything threatened you or your house?"

She had not considered it in that light before. There was a change, and it had come so gradually, so imperceptibly, that she had been the last one to recognise it. Somehow, this knowledge that there were those in Marken who cared for her for her own sake, gave her a greater sense of security and bravery than she had ever known.

"Come," he said, gently, "what harm do you think a man like Provarsk capable of, now? Why, if I wanted to take the trouble, I could start whispers throughout the kingdom to-night that the real reason for his plotting is that he intends to seize the throne, and exile your brother and yourself, and the people—yes—the very ones that he is now stirring to make foolish demands, would tear him to pieces and feed them to their dogs!"

"But why not do it?" she demanded, with all the eagerness of a conspirator.

"Because," he said, slowly, "I don't want it done that way. I want to punish him in my own way. Also, because I enjoy watching him, just

to learn how far he is capable. Why, if he can succeed, we ought to walk out! It would show that we are a lot of incompetents! If any other women talk to you of him, just tell them how grateful you are and forget it. Provarsk must have no inkling that I suspect him. I want that much understood. When the time is ripe—we shall see!"

After she had gone, the American sat for a long time alone, and staring absently through the open window as if made very happy by the knowledge that at last the princess was a real ally. Then, smiling grimly, he sent for Von Glutz, who happened to be accessible, and told his secretary that they were not to be disturbed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A STRANGE lassitude seemed to have overtaken Kent. In direct contrast to his old habitual energy, he now loitered habitually, taking long walks alone, dreaming alone, like a man who, finding his task done, has no further ambition and devotes himself to useless meditation. For weeks he appeared apathetic; so much so that the king, industrious, and the others of that little cohort whose activities he had directed and stimulated were gravely concerned. They suggested that he needed a rest; that he must be ailing; that it were better if he sought change. And to all these suggestions he smiled gravely and shook his head.

"It's like this," explained Ivan to Paulo, in private conference. "There is something on his mind, some trouble, some worry, that none shall ever know. I can not understand it—I who for years have been his shadow, his right hand, his friend of thought and service. He has not confided in me, which in itself is strange! Were he a youth, I should say he was involved in a hopeless love affair; but, being what he is, a rock, a

being as independent as the poles of the globe, I can not conceive what it is that has overtaken him!"

"And all the time," angrily asserted the Minister of Finance, "that Provarsk plots!"

It was true. And Kent, as well as his adherents, knew it; for Kent's sources of information brought him the constant and unanimous reports that the chancellor was adroitly using his time. The managers of the mines stated that the men were becoming daily more intractible and sullen, that nightly meetings were being held from which no information ever leaked, and that there was a growing unrest. There was no room to doubt that Provarsk was behind it all, and that Provarsk was carefully laying a powder train to cause an explosion; yet Kent, the master spirit of change, read the reports, or listened to them, and was lethargic.

Baron Von Glutz, the new enthusiast for road improvement, slipped hastily away to the outer world to inspect some new road-making machinery. Kent smiled at his enthusiasm. Paulo went to the other side of the toy kingdom to inspect work connected with his department. Again Kent smiled, and seemed happy to be left alone and unmolested.

And then, when least expected, Provarsk acted with his customary boldness. Kent, walking alone

in the garden late one night, and absorbed in thought, was abruptly startled by a soft crashing sound in the laurels on either side and suddenly realised that he was in the midst of a huge thicket where, if it came to a struggle, he would have but small chance. He whirled with the intention of running to a better field; but his foot caught on a rope that had been tied across the path, and he fell headlong. A man crashed through the bushes on one side and threw himself on Kent before the latter could regain his feet. He gathered his big powerful body that had in youth been inured by hard work and hard blattles with lumbermen, and threw himself quickly to one side, broke the hold on his arms with a sharp wrench, and rolled on top of his assailant. His hope had been to get to his feet; but the man beneath, disappointed in one way, took advantage of another and shifted his hold to Kent's neck. Instantly another adversary caught the American's heels and jerked his legs from under him so that he sprawled at length on the man in the path. Kent lifted his arm to strike and another man seized it strongly and clung to it. Kent's left fist struck this new assailant and elicited a grunt. Then, whilst he was trying to land a second blow, another man was added to the corps of assailants.

Kent fought so well that it took the best efforts of the four men to subdue him, after which he

was immediately handcuffed, and lifted to his feet.

"What's the meaning of all this?" he demanded, between pants.

"It means that you are under arrest," growled a hoarse voice. "Bring him along, men!"

"But where are you taking me?" Kent insisted.

"You'll find that out soon enough," was the reply.

Kent walked doggedly along in silence and without further protest, and was led directly to the private entrance to the palace, thence upward to his offices, where, despite the warmth of the night, the shades were drawn and the room in a blaze of light. As soon as his eyes were accustomed to the change he beheld, through the open door of his private office, Provarsk lazily seated in his private chair, and saw that the drawers of the desk had been wrenched open and that numerous papers were scattered on the floor.

"Ah! Got him, did you?" the chancellor remarked to the soldiers conducting Kent. "You did well. Couldn't have done much better in fact; but I was rather in hopes he would fight sufficiently hard to make extreme measures necessary."

He smiled pleasantly and came into the other room. Kent looked at the men around him and sneered when he discovered they were some of

Provarsk's original mercenaries, now become double traitors.

"However, it is just as well that you didn't have to—knock his brains out," the baron continued. "I find that the papers which are accessible are—not exactly those I wanted. Perhaps Mr. Kent will oblige us with the combination of his private vault?"

"Bless my soul! What an oversight!" Kent exclaimed. "You've not got the combination? Thoughtless of you. But, by the way, it would do you no good this evening, anyhow, Baron. It has the best time lock I could buy."

The baron walked over to the vault and inspected it, and it was evident that he was not familiar with such a modern device.

"Suppose you broke that clock off?" he inquired of Kent.

"Then even I could not open it," the American replied. "You may be certain that the vault will not open until after ten o'clock to-morrow."

"In that case all you can do is to give me the combination," said Provarsk, eyeing Kent insolently.

"For two centimes I wouldn't," Kent replied.

"And for two centimes, if you didn't, I'd throw you into a wet dungeon without food until you did," Provarsk promptly retorted.

"Um-m-m-h! By Jove! I believe you would,"

said Kent, admiringly, "and that being the case, I suppose I may as well give it to you."

"Exactly!" replied the chancellor. "Little courtesies will be duly appreciated."

"I've noticed that you were appreciative," Kent said, meaningly; "but inasmuch as I'm here and you are there, I don't see what else I can do but oblige. If you and my good faithful friends here are not afraid of me, perhaps you would kindly request them to remove this jewelry; otherwise I can't write."

Provarsk smiled at what he thought a sarcasm and asked the leading soldier if Kent had any weapons. On being assured that the American was unarmed the chancellor ordered the handcuffs removed.

"And let me caution you, Mr. Kent," he threatened, "that any attempt to escape or call for assistance may necessitate action on my part that I should regret to take. Furthermore it would be useless on your part, because there is no one in the palace who would attempt to assist you save the king and his royal sister, both of whom are now slumbering sweetly—with a guard outside their doors."

Kent looked about him as if seeking some one. Provarsk divined his look and added: "And that bear man of yours has also been taken in, and I believe is now nicely secured in one of the old

dungeons. I hope one was selected where there are plenty of rats."

Kent looked at the leader of the mercenaries who stood stockily by him, and whose protruding eyes batted themselves at intervals and were devoid of expression.

"He's got to be taken out of that dungeon," Kent said, emphatically.

"To quote one of your own phrases, 'Nothing doing!' " retorted the conspirator.

"All right! Nothing doing in the combination line, either," stubbornly returned the American.

Provarsk grinned at him with the kindliness of a hungry wolf; but influenced by his prisoner's fearless stare, paused to consider.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Kent, "I'll compromise. You have your friends put Ivan in a comfortable cell, and I'll not only give you the combination, but my parole. I'll agree that you can take me to my own room, and that I'll not leave there without first notifying you that I intend to do so. How's that?"

"This is to be a gentleman's agreement, is it, Kent?" Provarsk asked.

"It is."

"All right," the conspirator replied, "I'll accept it. Whatever else you are, I'll admit your word is absolutely good. Give me the combination."

Kent walked across to his desk, sat down, and with a steady hand wrote it on a piece of paper, blotted it, and passed it to Provarsk. The latter smiled lazily, and turned to the leading soldier.

"You have heard the agreement," he said. "See to it that we keep our part. Have that Ivan put in the most comfortable place of confinement we have. Take Mr. Kent to his room, and see that he is not disturbed. Of course he has no objections to a guard outside his door?"

"Not in the least," Kent assured him. "I like it. Keeps me from being lonesome. Sort of soothing in the dark. Now, before I retire, would you mind telling me what you are up to this time, and what it's all about?"

"Not in the least," said Provarsk with the same air of courtesy that was, in itself, akin to insult. "What I am up to is, first of all, to get rid of you. I'm going to put you out of the kingdom, and also I've taken steps to cut your claws. I secured the address of your employer, John Rhodes, at 65 Regent street, London, West, yesterday, and wrote him enclosing correspondence showing that you had not only made overtures to sell his concession to me, but had actually transferred it to me for a cash consideration, which I presumed was with his sanction. I explained that my object in writing was to have him remove you to other scenes of commercial activity, because you were personally

obnoxious to His Majesty, the king, and also to me, the chancellor. Needless to say the correspondence I sent him proving the sale of the mining concession, was signed by yourself. Unmistakably so."

Kent's eyes opened with genuine astonishment. This was a more adroit invention than he had credited Provarsk with being able to devise. He had written to Rhodes and——!

"You forged my name to those letters, eh?" he asked hotly. "Well, before I'm through with you I'll——"

"Do nothing! You can't; you are helpless. I've got you, this time, my smart Yankee friend, and got you in such a way that you can't escape. When I kick you out of Marken, you can take your choice; be tried by John Rhodes as a defaulter and convicted on my evidence that the letters are genuine, or put as much distance as you can between yourself and your employer. That is immaterial to me, either way."

"But—but the king! He will not submit to it!" declared Kent, on the defensive.

"The king? Poof! The king will do as I say, after this; otherwise, I'll send him trailing along after you in short order."

Kent's face was impassive.

"Take him to his room and let him think it over," ordered Provarsk, with a grin. "Good-

night, Mr. Richard Kent! I hope you have a very comfortable rest. I may call on you in the morning to assure myself of your comfort."

Kent, for once astonished at the man's ingenuity, turned and led the way out with never a word. Provarsk had proved a better enemy than he had believed him to be. He could but think of the letter and enclosures to John Rhodes and remember that the financier's reputation was that of being an inflexibly hard and unrelenting man whenever one of his underlings had proved delinquent. He tried to recall whether John Rhodes had always been just in such cases. Perhaps poor Barry, who had been sent to an American prison for something similar, had been a victim of some other Provarsk. And Simmons, the Englishman, when led from the dock to serve his sentence of three years hard labour, had protested his innocence to the very last. And both Simmons and Barry had been master agents, entrusted with great transactions, enjoying intimate acquaintance with John Rhodes! He looked very grave and preoccupied as they escorted him through the long, resounding corridors of the palace, dimly lighted, and suggestive of the long corridors of a prison where a man who was innocent of the crime for which he had been convicted, might helplessly eat his heart away. The very sound of their footsteps suggested the tread of warders and guards.

A problem presented itself to him in which he attempted to stand aloof like an outside spectator, and speculate what John Rhodes, the richest and most feared man in the world, would do upon the receipt of such letters. Would he be tolerant and kind, or severe and unrelenting, with such evidence against Richard Kent, the trusted agent, who had at last yielded to a very great temptation and gone wrong?

His guard halted and opened a door. Kent walked through and closed it behind him. He was alone in his accustomed room with his problem. And then it occurred to him that there is such an influence as justice, and that justice will not be denied. There was a king. The king, though it cost him his throne—though it cost him everything he prized in the world—would under such circumstances find and confront Rhodes, and declare it all a lie. And Rhodes under those circumstances would be compelled to believe. Kent's long and varied training in reading men told him that the king would prove a loyal, fighting, steadfast friend, and that in such an outrageous, diabolical plan as Provarsk's, this would prove to be the weak point in the chancellor's armour.

Kent disrobed, bathed the dust of that stiff physical contest on the garden path from his face, and climbed into bed. To-morrow was merely to-

morrow, to be met as his judgment dictated. Within ten minutes he was sleeping as soundly as if nothing mattered and he were but a tired boy.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

KENT, breakfasting in his room, heard not only the singing of birds in the garden, but a persistent and increasing monotone of sound that pervaded everywhere, caused by the shuffling of many feet along the streets outside the palace walls, the indistinct hum of many voices, the grating of cart wheels over the roads, and an occasional shrill call rising above others. The atmosphere itself seemed charged and ready for a single spark to cause the explosion of revolt. At this hour of the morning, ordinarily, Marken would have been absorbed in industry, an industry that he had compelled and that had become habitual. This he thought, bitterly, was the result of too much prosperity. This was the price for arousing a slothful, shortsighted people and teaching them roads to wealth and ambition. The poorest churl in the fields had learned the value of his own earning power and profited, while others, who had been worse than hopeless, had seen the way to independence. Kent wondered if, after all, he had not taught them greed instead of industry, independence, and patriotism. He heard

some one coming rapidly along the corridor, the guard's heels coming to a salute, and the door opened and the king entered, his whole personality radiating indignation.

"This is an outrage!" he declared. "I found a guard in front of my door this morning who told me of your arrest and confinement to your room. He made no objection to my coming here and so I came at once. We will go immediately and have Provarsk seized. Come!"

Kent slowly shook his head.

"I can not," he said. "I am under parole of honour to remain here."

The king stood aghast.

"You gave your word to that treacherous——"

"Yes, and shall keep it."

"Then I will at once go alone and act. I'll——"

"No, no; let us consider." Kent checked him.

"But—but it may mean revolt! How do we know that he has not bribed or overcome enough of the guards; that——"

"No fear," said Kent easily. "Some of them, perhaps; but I have certain reason to believe that on Baron Von Glutz' return there will be—um-m-mh—a change in the situation."

"But Kent! Kent! Are you mad?" demanded the king. "Time! Time is against us. You don't know what is happening! What do you

think of this?" he cried, thrusting a paper toward the American.

Kent took it, said, "Have a seat, Your Majesty," and read. It was a proclamation with all official seals and form, calling upon the inhabitants, and especially those employed in the manganese mines, to assemble in the Market Place at eleven o'clock of that day, where communications of the utmost importance to their welfare and the welfare of the state would be made. Kent read it slowly to himself, gave a wry twist to his mouth, and looked at his visitor.

"I observe," he said, with quiet meaning, "that it does not end quite as royal decrees customarily do. It does not bear the words 'God save the King.'"

The king, who had been twisting impatiently on his chair, exclaimed, "No, it doesn't. I noted that point."

"When did this appear?" the American asked, recalling the hour when the attack had been made on him.

"It was posted up by the chancellor's orders between one and two o'clock this morning. The guard told me so."

"The guard, then, was friendly?"

"Yes, and very much distressed. He apologised to me, and said that he could but obey his

orders; that he could not understand. I called him inside and closed the door, and told him to tell me all he knew. He did. He says that Provarsk has won over some of those adventurers he first brought here, and that they have been talking to all the others in the guard room."

"Did this man get any inkling of Provarsk's intentions?"

"Yes. Enough to cause him and all the others that are loyal to be highly alarmed. These passed the word around that they believed they could best serve the throne and you by obeying up to a certain point. They wish to know what to do."

"But Provarsk's intentions?" interrupted Kent, bringing the king back to the point.

"Provarsk is going to announce this morning that the mining concession has been turned over to him, wrested from you and John Rhodes in behalf of the people by him, and he will promise that hereafter the profits shall be shared by those who do the work. After that he proposes to inflame the people to demonstrate in force and demand of me that a like course shall be pursued with all other state holdings, and that those which the state does not completely own shall be returned to the original or minority owners to be run hereafter without state interference. My guard gathered all this from stray talk made by Provarsk's henchmen, who, already certain of success, are be-

ginning to boast of the authority they are going to have."

Kent's eyes glowed with interest.

"That guard of yours," he declared, "is due for a good commission after this is over. I seem to have overlooked him." He meditated for a moment, and then to the king's surprise, as if vastly relieved, leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"Amateur work, after all!" he declared. "I'm disappointed! Provarsk had me guessing, last night. I thought he was a much cleverer fighter than I had believed him to be. He always boggles in the end."

"I don't see the joke!" exclaimed the king, but more hopefully.

"Why, it is this way," explained Kent. "Plain as day now. He poses as a national benefactor, but no one would be able to tell, if he did actually get possession of the mines, what the profits are. He probably would divide up some of the profits as long as it served his purpose. And after that——!" He snapped his fingers derisively. "In the meantime he insures my being driven from Marken, and forces you to turn over everything that produces an income; also to let government controlled private industries revert to those private individuals who own the outside stock. That includes the Marken mineral springs in

which he has invested every dollar he has in the world, and all he could borrow. It's so easy now that it's scarcely interesting!"

"But the people don't know that you have the concession," objected the king. "They think I still own the mines for the state, and that the profits have been turned to the redemption of the state bonds; and they are confident that after the bonds are redeemed I'm going to spend more money for the good of the state. The minute Provarsk exposes the whole affair, they will lose confidence in me and my intentions."

The American regarded the king's distress with sympathy.

"But, suppose you had never granted the concession, and that you did own the mines, free from everything?"

"As soon as your bonds have been met, I'd give them the profits—all of them! You certainly know that I do care for my people and am unselfish! I want to be just what they have thought me to be, Kent, the best king that Marken ever had! I want to be able to do again what I have done, walk out amongst them, and know that they respect me as a king, and like me as a man and a friend."

He spoke impassionedly, voicing the hunger of his mind, confessing his dream, while the American watched him kindly as an elder brother might

watch the harassments of a younger one when about to tender sympathy and assistance.

"All right!" he said, bluntly. "I think we can fix that up. It may be foolish on my part—damned foolish! But a man can't pass through this world without being foolish once in a while. I'm going to give you that concession."

The king's face expressed many emotions, and among them solicitous affection.

"But—but Rhodes?" he asked excitedly. "What will Rhodes think of you?"

"I've got to take my chances of squaring it with him. Most always he does about as I want him to. I've made a lot of money for John Rhodes, one time and another, and he knows it. Besides, I am going to tell you something. The last penny that Marken owed John Rhodes, together with two per cent interest, was paid him more than a week ago. If, after all that, he kicked, he'd be more of a dog than I ever suspected him of being."

The king, stupefied by the news that he was free from debt, gasped, but Kent disregarded him.

He got up and locked the door to make certain that he would not be disturbed, walked briskly across the room to a book case, and spoke with the proud delight of an ingenious boy.

"Come here," he said. "I want to show you something. Pretty clever, I call it. My own idea.

Ivan and I did most of the work. Now look over here. On this side of the room, right under the mantel—see this marble ornament? Well, it's nothing but a plain, common old American electric latch; the kind we have over home when we live on the top flat and want to open the ground floor door for a caller. Push on it!"

The king, still speechless, did so. There was a sharp click, and the book case swung away from the wall, exposing a modern safe behind it. The king's eyes were wide with curiosity.

"That's the way she works," Kent exclaimed, proudly. "Thought it out myself, for emergencies. I haven't kept any papers of importance in the vault of my office for more than three months. I'd give a hundred dollars to watch Provarsk when he opens it with the combination I gave him last night. It's quite empty."

He chuckled as he bent over and twirled the knob, pulled the heavy door open, brought out a drawer and took from it a piece of paper that the king recognised. He opened it and glanced at it to make certain of its identity, held it before the king to show what it was and then deliberately tore it to shreds, which he threw into the fireplace and lighted.

"There goes the concession," he said, gazing at the flames. "The manganese are yours, unmortgaged, free from all debt and all obligations."

He turned with a warm smile on his face, and silenced the king, who began remonstrating.

"I'll tend to my part of it," he said. "It's up to you to do yours. Let me handle the situation here. You must rush back to your rooms, summon the heralds, get into your state glory so as to be more impressive than Solomon, and hurry down to the Market Place."

He consulted his watch.

"You've no time to lose. If I were you I'd not let them know but that you personally summoned them. You'd better go now, and, whatever you do, don't let Provarsk know you've been here."

He fairly shoved the king toward the door, hushing his protestations of gratitude with a gruff —"We can talk about all that later. Not now! Not now! Hurry!"

He carefully closed the safe and swung the book case back into its normal position, after which, for some minutes, he stood scowling thoughtfully out over the garden, as if formulating new plans, and then walked slowly across to the door and opened it.

"I'd like to speak to you," he said to the guard. "Come inside."

The man hesitated, looked up and down the corridor and grinned. Kent was secretly pleased and knew that he was not mistaken in his surmise

that one who had always been ready to betray for money would do so again to the highest bidder. The man entered and closed the door behind him, with a look of cupidity in his eyes.

"You are out for money!" Kent said brusquely. "I'm going to make it worth your while to go at once, get my man Ivan and bring him here. You can tell the sentry it's Provarsk's order. If you do that within the next fifteen minutes, you get five thousand francs in gold and no one the wiser. Can you do it?"

The man took another look into the corridor, seemed satisfied, and said: "How will you pay me?"

"You know that I keep my word, don't you?" Kent retorted. "I tell you I'll pay you the minute Ivan is in this room!"

The mercenary hesitated, scratched his head and took the plunge. He ran on tiptoe down the hall. Kent hastened to his secret safe, and took therefrom some rolls of coin and waited. His bribe was effective, for within the time Ivan appeared and the guard took the bribe money with a chuckle and left them.

"Ivan," Kent said in the soundless speech he employed when they were alone, "I rather think that, within a short time, Provarsk will be here and our interview may not be pleasant. Go into my dressing room there and leave the door ajar

sufficiently to observe what takes place. If he gets ugly, I may need you."

"I understand," said the giant, nodding his head. "And I shall be there if needed. Is that all?"

"Yes," replied Kent, "that's all. And, Ivan, be wary of him if you do have to come out. I don't believe that man likes you! 'Pon my word I don't! And if he could, he might try to hurt you."

Ivan's mouth opened into a wide grin, as he went to Kent's dressing room and pulled the door carefully shut, save for a tiny crack. Kent paced restlessly about the room, pausing once to admire, absently, as he had done a hundred times before, the intricate carvings of a huge wooden screen that formed a snug little corner. Time was moving and he wondered why Provarsk did not appear, for he confidently expected him. Had that astute gentleman discovered the counter move that was being made against him, and taken steps for its circumvention? It did not seem possible.

With brisk elation he heard a tap on the door and when the sentry entered looked expectantly over his shoulder, confident that Provarsk was there.

"Her Royal Highness, the Princess Eloise," announced the sentry, and the American was

troubled as he bade the man open the door for her, and himself moved toward it.

She entered hurriedly and closed the door behind her. Her anxiety and excitement were marked.

"Tell me," she said, hastily advancing, "what has taken place. Karl had no time. He told me to come here and ask you. Why is there a sentry?"

"Princess Eloise," he said quietly, "I am under arrest by Provarsk's orders; but your brother and I have taken steps that will render him very harmless."

She looked at him with pronounced consternation that was augmented when he added, "Steps also that render my remaining longer in Marken unnecessary, so I shall soon be going."

"In the midst of such an emergency?"

"I do not believe it will be an emergency very long," he said, gravely. "And I do not believe that after to-day I shall be needed. Therefore I expect to leave Marken within a few days."

"But you can't!" she insisted, desperately.

A slow change came over his face, the change that his intimates in big affairs would have called his "Poker face," a face that would be wooden regardless of whatever depression, elation, craft or plan passed through his mind.

"Nevertheless," he replied, quietly, "I am going!"

"Surely not!" she expostulated. "I don't believe it. It's as if you were beaten—were running away!"

"Perhaps it may look that way—now," he said, watching to see the effect of his words.

The princess' distress increased. Her hands came together, and he saw that her slender fingers had interlocked as though by this grip to obtain strength for repression. He would have given all that was his to have caught them in his own strong palms and to have comforted, soothed, and reassured her, but he dared not. He had schooled himself to the knowledge that from her viewpoint he was but a capable money lender, possibly a good friend, while she was that product of nurturing and breeding, a princess royal. His rebellion at this condition brought out a trifle of that controlled savagery that made him strong.

"Why should I stay here any longer," he asked, "when all I came to do is done? I have paid John Rhodes every cent of his money. That was my mission, was it not? That and nothing more."

She lifted her head and regarded him with astonishment. His immobile face bespoke no inward hesitation. Nothing but calm purpose. He was inscrutable. She sustained a conflict of emo-

tions, but all her respect and liking, so slowly upbuilt, were wounded by his words.

"I thought," she said hesitantly, "that you had remained for something more—than that. I thought friendship, a liking for a great work, a happiness in doing something worth while, had been reasons."

He smiled but did not answer. She interpreted his silence as an admission that she had been mistaken in her estimate of him, and that he had been imbued with nothing but selfish motives. She spoke regretfully, now, and he saw that her reserve was breaking; that, tried and distressed, she was giving way.

"I thought we meant something to you, my brother and I! And I tried to be worthy of what I thought you were. I believed you to be the greatest man I had ever known! Karl would have done anything for you. I would——"

She paused, twisted her fingers still harder and then looked at him with eyes like those of a hurt child, candid, outspoken in humiliated confession. "I would have given anything to have you be my friend, as you have been Karl's." She paused, bit her lip, then impetuously clenched her hands and with sheer recklessness added, "I would have given much more—to have helped you—always. If you had failed and been beaten, honourably fighting, I would have liked to go to you,

and put my hand in yours, and walk with you in defeat! I was sick of illusion—of sham royalty—of polite lies! I wanted your esteem! Yours! all of it! And now, I despise myself for it!"

She stopped, choked by her own humiliation, and looked at him; but his eyes were on the floor, his hands hanging listlessly open, his heavy shoulders and stalwart frame inert, and passive, as if all she had confessed, and all her scorn, were not capable of moving him. For a long time she stood thus, quivering, while he stood dumbly before her. The chirping of birds in the sunlit gardens outside, the slow measured footsteps of the sentry in the corridor without, and that ominous, distant hum of Marken itself came to them accentuated in volume by their own silence. The echoes of her voice, like the appealing sobs of disillusionment coming from a hurt heart, died away like the last faint sounds of a requiem. Dumbly, like one astounded by some overwhelming surprise, he lifted his head and met her eyes. All the old bravery was gone from them. Gone, too, all the old mockery, the old readiness of response, the quick acceptation of overchanging chance. Something in their great seriousness, in their very depths, made her catch her breath. She saw that he was humbly, yet desperately, fighting to speak; that words were being sought and that none satisfied.

There was a clamorous, insolent note added to

that murmuring diapason of sound that swept monotonously through the room, the sound of some one clanking his way through the outer corridor. It stormed his ears like the call of a trumpet announcing battle. It whirled him back to his own sphere of action, where men were to be met, where a fight, the fight he knew as a veteran, was imminent. His hands shot forward and caught hers, and his big body became endowed with a suggestion of bent steel, alive, ready to spring. He was the master again.

"Listen!" he commanded her, his words crowding one upon the other. "Go quickly behind that screen and sit down! Hurry! Sit there and hear what is said. Say nothing! My honour in your eyes may depend upon it—and that—is more to me than everything else in the world."

He caught her by the shoulders in his strong hands, whirled her, bewildered, across the few steps intervening, thrust her into an easy chair behind the screen, and was out again toward the door through which Provarsk was entering and which he locked behind him. She heard Kent's voice, cool, casual, greeting his sole opponent.

"Well," it said, "I've been expecting you. Did you open that vault yet?"

Provarsk laughed; but not with mirth.

"Yes, I opened it. And found just what I rather expected. Nothing."

"Disappointed?" queried the American, with cool insolence.

"Not much," came the ready reply with equal coolness. "The way you passed the combination over was—well—significant."

"Suppose we sit down," Kent suggested. "We've got quite a lot of things to discuss, haven't we?"

"That depends on you. Of course if you are quite amenable—— I seem to be in the position of strength. I'll listen to anything you've got to offer."

"You'll listen? That's good. If you only came to listen, why did you come at all? Say, Provarsk! You don't think I'm fool enough to believe you came here merely on a polite visit, do you? Just because you wanted to hear the sweet sound of my voice? You came because I've got things you want. Things you think I might trade. Things that if you don't get, might upset your little pile of bricks and tip you over into the gutter. Come, let's not try to play blind man's buff. What are you after? What card do you need to fill your flush?"

"Pretty fair talk for a man who is shut in his own room under arrest," commented Provarsk. "What is it the English call it—Swank. Yes, that's it. Bluff, I think you style it, you Yankees."

"Not at all," Kent insisted, seriously. "A real

bluff is where you haven't got the goods, but try to make the other fellow believe you have. Swank, on the contrary, is merely an exaggeration of what you possess. Neither word is applicable, because I've got what you have to have. I under arrest? Poof! That's nothing, because I've got what is known as the moral supremacy, the initiative. Also because you are afraid of me and that I might possibly kick your apple cart with a lot of freckled wares into the garbage pile."

"Good!" gaily responded the baron. "Quite good! Nothing like frank admission to get to a business basis, is there? You can make it a lot more certain for me. And in return I can at least make it certain that you shall have a chance to wander farther afield with a whole hide."

"And if I don't prove agreeable?" questioned Kent.

"Then," declared the conspirator, with a great air of regret, "I am afraid you won't wander anywhere at all. About the cheapest thing in Marken is a lot in the cemetery."

"Um-m-mh," mused the American. "If you are so certain of your ground, I can't quite see why you bother with me. You wouldn't do it. No, indeed! You'd order the lot."

"Right again," cheerfully agreed the baron.

"Well, then let's get down to brass tacks. What are you after?"

Provarsk got up and began to move about the room, much to Kent's disturbance.

"Sit down," he said. "I don't like to talk business to a man who is running a race with himself."

Provarsk sat down and came straight to the point.

"I can get your transfer of that mining concession whether you give it or not," he said, meaningly.

"In the same way you got my signatures to letters I never wrote, eh?"

"Exactly," admitted Provarsk, with a grin. "But it might save some further trouble with your employer, John Rhodes, if I actually got the transfer from you."

"I believe you are right about that," Kent agreed. "But you haven't yet explained where I come in. I'm not fool enough to believe you are doing this for the good of the state, you know."

"Of course I'm not!" Provarsk declared, contemptuously. "I'm doing it for my own good and no one's else."

"How do you propose to handle the king?" demanded Kent.

"He'll have to do what I want him to, for the simplest of reasons, that I shall have the people behind me. He'll get nothing! He can be king. That's enough for him."

"Yes?" said Kent, invitingly. "Now about me.

You have already written to Rhodes. Do I get nothing, too?"

"That's just what I'm coming to," observed the baron. "You've been a good gamester, but you've lost, all the way round. You and I agree on just one thing, which is that either of us keeps his word when he can do so. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think it is."

"Then if I gave you my word as a gentleman on anything, you'd accept it, wouldn't you?"

"I think I should."

"Very well, that simplifies matters. The king has been getting ten per of the net revenues from the mines. From now on he gets nothing, and you shall have five per cent hereafter, to be forwarded to you wherever you choose to hide from Rhodes, provided that you give me that concession. Only, of course, you've got to stay away from Marken. That's understood in any event."

With a studied air of deliberation Kent looked up at the ceiling, until Provarsk began to move restlessly.

The latter consulted his watch and got hastily to his feet.

"I've no further time to waste in politeness," he declared, with sharp emphasis. "I shall give you just five minutes more in which to decide."

"Why this haste? Got anything important to do?" asked Kent in bland surprise.

"I have," asserted the baron, crisply.

"Well, Provarsk, you can spare yourself the trouble," said Kent with the utmost sarcasm. "I know your full plans. I even surmised you might try to seize me and instructed Von Glutz, who, by the way, will be on hand with sufficient strength to act this very morning, that unless it became a question of saving my life he was not to interfere with you. With the exception of perhaps a half dozen men, the palace guard is still loyal and awaiting my orders. I could have summoned assistance last night with a single call!"

Provarsk looked incredulous. He concealed the fear that slowly gripped him, and snapped his fingers.

"Bluffing again," he said. "Come, my time is up."

"Going to read a proclamation to the people, or anything like that? If so you may as well save yourself the trouble. By this time the king is already reading his."

Provarsk's face, at this statement, went white with rage.

"You lie!" he shouted.

"I don't," calmly disputed Kent, in his turn arising to his feet. "I've already returned him his concession and he is by this time presenting

the manganese mines, gratis, to the citizens of Marken. Another thing! You needn't worry about what John Rhodes might do to me. I happen to be John Rhodes, myself! You are——"

There was a shout, a curse, a woman's scream and a pistol shot sounding together in confusion. Provarsk, infuriated, had whipped a gun from his pocket so unexpectedly that Ivan had not time to reach him; but the princess had, with desperation, flung the screen heavily against Provarsk's arm, and the bullet, deflected from its mark, spattered itself in minute particles of flying lead over the tiled floor. Outside, the sentry battered clamourously on the stout door. In the debris of the screen two men now struggled furiously, Ivan and Provarsk, the latter striving with desperate intent to twist his pinioned hand once more in Kent's direction, and swearing that, no matter what happened, he would at least kill him. His persistence angered the giant, who had seized his forearm, and now threw him to the floor. With a roar like that of a charging lion he seemed for the first time to exert his full strength. He was unswerving and pitiless. His huge right shoulder suddenly lifted until the muscles of his neck were swollen and rigid, there was the harsh snap of breaking bones, an agonised scream from Provarsk, and Kent leapt forward.

"Ivan! Ivan!" he shouted, forgetting that the

latter could not hear. The princess backed away against the wall, with a stare of fascinated, expectant horror; for Ivan, with all the hatred he had sustained for the chancellor unleashed, was intent on killing him this time, regardless of Kent's entreaties. He snatched the pistol from the floor and despite Kent's efforts planted the muzzle against Provarsk's temple. He tried to discharge it; but in his haste had unwittingly thrown the safety clutch. Provarsk, helpless beneath him, glared upward with eyes that did not quail. The curious, reckless, fearless daring of the man did not desert him in the least now that he was at the end. Kent caught Ivan's arm in both his own, but the enraged giant threw him off, dexterously dropped the pistol, caught it by the muzzle, and lifted his arm high above his head intent on crushing Provarsk's skull with the butt of the weapon. Quick as light, Kent saw his opportunity, and caught the upraised wrist from behind, threw all his weight against it, and slowly bent Ivan sidewise from over his victim. The giant, though taken at this disadvantage, yielded only inch by inch, overborne by the strength of Kent that, with any ordinary man, would have been overpowering. Kent's jaws were set until the muscles of his cheeks shone in knots and his eyes were aflame.

"Let me kill him! For God's sake, don't inter-

fere!" Ivan shouted, and then, pleading for the privilege of destroying Provarsk, was toppled over, breathing hoarsely, and looking up into Kent's face. Slowly the red flame burned out of his eyes, as he recovered control of himself. The pistol fell from his hand, and the princess, with a spring as graceful as a leopard's seized it and retreated to a safe distance.

"Promise me that you will not hurt him, Ivan! I tell you not to! Are you mad, man?"

"I promise," said Ivan, sullenly, but relaxing himself, and Kent arose. Ivan got slowly to his feet, with a stare of hatred and defeated intent at Provarsk, who was painfully trying to extricate himself from the pieces of splinted screen.

Kent put his hand firmly, but gently, beneath him and assisted him to his feet, and then to a chair. There was no need to ask his condition. The loosely swinging arm told its own story.

The door gave way under a fresh onslaught and several guardsmen fell into the room. Behind them could be seen two others holding Provarsk's mercenary between them. Kent smiled grimly and said, "Thank you, men; but I do not require your help. Pull what's left of the door shut and at once go and arrest or kill Provarsk's hired men. Leave one man on guard outside in case I want him."

They saluted and obeyed with convincing alacrity.

"Provarsk," said Kent, "I'm very sorry! I didn't wish that done to you."

"That's all right, Rhodes, or Kent, if you prefer it. It's nothing to what I wanted to do to you," gamely retorted the baron.

"Or nothing compared to what Ivan wanted to do to you," remarked Kent.

"Why didn't you let him finish it? In your place I should have done so," Provarsk asserted, without rancour, and clutching his shattered arm.

"Because," declared Kent, with quiet dignity, "I have punished you enough. You are finished as it is. Somehow, I'm sorry! You're a game man, Baron, and—I like them. I shall send for a surgeon."

"Oh, may as well put that off for a few minutes," the chancellor said, wincing with a physical pain that barely exposed itself in his level voice. "May as well tell me the worst."

"There's not much more to tell," Kent said, gently. "Only that I've beaten you past any chance of your coming back. By this time you are not even the chancellor, I think. I fancy Von Glutz, the loyal, has come back to his own. And you are broke. Broken like an empty egg shell!"

Provarsk shut his teeth, tried to get his arm to a less painful position, attempted a brave smile,

and said, "I think not. The Marken Mineral Company, my dear Mr. Rhodes——"

"Is worthless! I couldn't quite forgive your trying to bribe my secretary, Provarsk. That wasn't playing the game. I went after you on that. It's a rule of finance to get a man who tries to bite your leg under the table. I got you! The only unprofitable, completely worthless enterprise in Marken, is the one in which you've put every dollar you could get. I saw to that. I kept it going at a total loss just for your benefit. You're not worth a copper centime. You'll have to borrow money to buy your railway ticket out—unless —unless I relent. Maybe I shall. There are a lot of things I like about you. There are a lot of places where I can use brave men, if they are willing to be honest, and you are at least brave."

"I don't think," said the baron, biting his lip to hide his mental and physical pain, "that I can accept anything from you; but I will say this—just to show you that in my way I am fair—if I can ever learn this game you play—this thing of finance, and I can find any way to have another go at you, I'll do it! And—and while I'm doing it, all the time, I'll like and admire you, and——" He shut his teeth savagely in a determined effort to subdue the giddiness and weakness that was mastering him, and then, with a long sigh, fell sideways and would have fallen to the floor had

not Kent leapt forward and caught him in his arms.

He picked him up as if he were of no weight, and strode across the room, followed by the princess, and Ivan, whose eyes had roved from lip to lip seizing the spoken words.

"Princess Eloise," the American called anxiously over his shoulder, "please summon some one to help me. And also a surgeon. Send them to my private room. And—and—" he stammered desperately—"wait for me—here!"

Her face flushed, as if, in this turmoil, she had interpreted some hidden significance in his words; but she ran across the room, called the sentry from the corridor, and Kent heard her words.

"Send two men from the guard room at once to assist Mr. Kent. Then go—quickly—as fast as you can, and summon the court surgeon. Hurry! Mr. Kent asks you to. Go quickly!"

Ivan closed the door, dumbly, and the sound of her voice was cut off.

"Here, Ivan," Kent's lips moved as he turned his head toward his follower from the side of his own bed on which he had deposited the chancellor. "Help me to get his clothes off, while he is unconscious. You should not have done this. I can't fire you, because after a fashion you and I are pals. But I'd give a thousand dollars to be

big enough to take it out of your hide, you big, ill-tempered chump!''

And Ivan, knowing a lot that was not embodied in his employer's speech, and having absorbed that strange but true philosophy of Owen Wister's conveyed through the Virginian, merely grinned and began unlacing the baron's shoes.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE PRINCESS ELOISE tiptoed to the shattered hall door, and, with infinite care, passed through and closed it behind her. Then, hesitant, perturbed, distressed, she looked down the long reaches, lonely as a deserted avenue, as if considering a direction for flight. She paused, torn between the tugging hand of convention and desire, that dragged her in diverse ways. Convention urged her that she was of the blood of proud and lasting kings, certain to find her place upon some potent throne, inevitably destined to rule, endowed by nature, and trained religiously to that small caste whose slightest wish becomes a necessity with the people beneath. But desire cried aloud that all was vain, all happiness lost, the world barren, the future a desert, if now she closed her ears to the cry of her heart. A choice of queendom lay before her; one over a vast number whom she might serve, and assist, with a high nobility of purpose, and the other over one subject, a strange, brusque, many-sided man who would give of strength, and soul, and fealty, all that he had to give and if need be, uncomplain-

ingly as a duty, reverently as a sacrifice, his life.

Life stretched before her like the corridor, in two directions, each leading from the other. Steadily, with clear eyes and clarity of mind, she weighed one route against the other, and then, with bent head, and tremulous breath, she made her decision. She turned, retraced her steps, opened the door very gently, stepped inside the room she had left, and closed the door behind. Kent, grave, embarrassed, and yet determined, came but a moment later from his sleeping chamber, and closed the door leading to it; but not with his habitual directness and decision. This was not the man she had seen confidently striding his way, staring direct with the radiation of personal power and purpose, intent on some goal beyond other eyes. Instead, there was about him a curious attitude of awkwardness, appeal and reverence, a strange lack of confidence. For an instant only she forced herself to meet his eyes. They cried their message to hers across the silent, waiting room. The sounds of the outside world, in which that day the future of a nation was being irrevocably decided, became hushed and still. She seemed to hear in that same soundless silence the struggle of his mind as it fell upon and conquered his tongue. Forced by decision to meet this portentous issue, she heard him coming toward her. His voice sounded as if reaching her from a long dis-

tance, so quiet, so gentle, so grave it was in this decisive moment of its existence.

"You," it said, "are a princess. I am nothing, save that which I am—a man who has done his best. A plebeian man, Princess Eloise, because all that I have tried and all that I have done, may seem insignificant in your eyes. But what I am, I am."

The voice paused in that time she stood with hands crossed above her breast not daring to lift her eyes to his; paused as if gathering power to find the way.

"I should not dare to speak," it proceeded, more firmly, "had you not said what you did a while ago. You said that you would have given anything for——" he hesitated and spoke scarcely above a whisper, as if a repetition of her words were profanation, as if he, a penitent, approached slowly on hands and knees to confession. "You said that you would have given anything for my friendship, for my esteem! That you had wanted to help me—always!" He spoke the last word like one reading the ultimate word of life from the open book of destiny, laid once before us all. "Oh, Eloise!" he cried with a tenderness beyond all she had dreamed, "I am like that poor, foolish juggler of Notre Dame, who, unable to do more than juggle gay balls upon his hands and feet, yet dared toss them at the shrine of Our Lady,

and thus gave all he had to give! I am helpless! I am nothing, in this fight—the only one from which I've ever flinched. I wanted to go before I gave myself away; but you said—you said——"

He stopped and she knew that the poet soul of him that had been so scrupulously concealed from all the world, was bursting its way, released by the alchemy of love, to his last abashed declaration. She waited intent on what he might say, this man who had posed through all his life as one without sentiment, hard, inflexible, masterful, and who now for the first time was stripping nude his spirit.

"Do you know," he said, "I've always been ashamed of something that I liked—something I read. It seemed too fine to say aloud; but it's what I want to say now:

"I am he that cries aloud beneath your gates,
"With eyes uplifted to the moon, the night, your castle walls.
"No beggar I for paltry dole! No suppliant for paltry favours,
"Worthless, ephemeral, and indifferently thrown.
"I ask all you have; all you have been; all you are;
"All that you may ever be.
"I am that throbbing thing of love,
"Venturesome, calling for its own."

There was a child's bashfulness and simplicity in his declamation. He spoke as if ashamed to voice those inner and concealed sentiments that he had so studiously veiled throughout his life. Nothing but the quick knowledge that she had seen him as he was in truth, kept her from laughing at him. And then there came to her the realisation, not without a sense of triumph, that she knew, beyond all others, this strange, reticent, retiring man whose very name had been feared by some of those esteemed as powerful. That of her alone, in all the world, he stood in awe.

"If I had known then who—who you really were——" she faltered. "If—if I had not been so terribly disappointed, I should not have said what I did."

She paused; but without ever looking up at him she knew that he recoiled as from a blow. And then, bravely, she took the plunge, and added in a voice that was scarcely louder than the exquisite sound of the wind's fingers playing upon a harp, "But now that I know my mistake, and that you have not been defeated, I—I have nothing to retract."

She heard him coming slowly toward her, and lifted her eyes to his grim, rugged, homely face, and beheld it transfigured like the top of some weather-scarred crag suddenly illumined by sunlight. The warmth and majesty of a great love

were there, the imperative will to seize, and to shield, and the longing to prove worth by sacrifice.

He would have taken her hand, awkwardly, as some poor courtier might; but nothing less than full relinquishment was in her heart. And so she lifted her arms swiftly upward, caught his face for a long moment between her hands, looked deeply into his eyes and then, contented with what she saw, bent farther toward him, and was caught and held.

Forgetful of all else, deaf to all else, they had not heard the roaring tumult that came sweeping toward the palace, increased in the crescendo of proximity, and that now suddenly burst overwhelmingly upon their ears in terrifying volume. It sounded as if something had gone wrong; as if revolt had in full strength rushed upon them. They turned and hastened to the window. The great garden of the palace had been invaded by a mob of people, the foremost of whom rushed excitedly to places beneath the windows, while, rapidly, other waves surged behind, closed in, and became more dense until even the walls were mounted by upthrown crests. For a moment it was difficult to distinguish the character of that tremendous shouting, or to know whether menace or approval was the dominant note. And then, suddenly, a red-faced man who had been crowded into the basin of a fountain climbed triumphantly to its

top, where he stood silhouetted against the sky, waved his arms, and in a stentorian voice that swept over all else began to sing the national anthem. Instantly other voices took it up, until to the beating of time by that lone figure aloft it became united, and overpowering, battering the walls, the trees, and the skies with stately blows. The lips of the Princess Eloise quivered and her eyes filled with tears of emotion. Kent felt his hands clenching as he caught the meaning, and knew that it was an ovation to the king; but even then he could not understand why the giving of the mines had so stirred the people. His door was jerked open unceremoniously, and the king ran in, followed by Paulo and Von Glutz, all appearing scarcely less excited and jubilant than those below.

At sight of his sister and Kent, the king waved his state sword above his head and saluted the hilt with his lips.

"Marken! Marken!" he shouted as gallantly as any of his mailed ancestors might have done when announcing victory after battle.

"What have you done?" demanded Kent, once more the cool man of affairs.

"I've gone you one better, my friend, and acted without any one's advice. I've not only done as you suggested, but I've taken a long step farther. I've told them that, without their asking it, and

because I have faith in them, I surrender all arbitrary rights of the crown and that from this time henceforth Marken is to be a liberal government, in which the people are to exercise their own judgment and powers, and that not even England herself can boast of greater freedom and democracy. I've given them their liberty. Marken is no longer an autocracy!"

He paused, proud of the effect he had produced, and saw the great approval that shone from his sister's eyes; but, before he could proceed, the doughty old Von Glutz took up the tale.

"That's not all! He didn't tell you all!" he roared. "His Majesty ended by telling them that if they chose they could even do away with a king and make Marken a republic. That was when they first shouted so loudly, and what they yelled was, 'No! No! God save the king! God save Karl the Great!' And—by the Lord Almighty! They meant it! They stormed the platform. They lifted him up and carried him in their arms. Old women cried and knelt at his feet. They held their dirty babies up for him to touch. And then some of the women began to shout, 'God save the Princess Eloise!' and that started them all off again. The king got himself heard at last and told them that the credit was not his. That they owed it all to you, Kent. And then Karl did a fool thing. Told

them that you two were here and that the palace grounds were open. Listen! Hear that!"

The song had ceased and great shouts were again storming them.

"The Princess Eloise! Our Princess Eloise!" and "Kent! Kent! Kent!"

They saw him, the man who loathed publicity, quail like a bashful youth, and saw the princess catch his hand and almost drag him toward the balcony. Then he seemed to recall something that must be done and braced himself, and strode forward. He stopped abruptly just inside the door and motioned to the king. The king smiled and stepped out, followed by the princess. Like the abrupt discharge of heavy guns the noise renewed as Kent followed them, and Von Glutz and Paulo, rigid, unmoved, came behind and took their posts in the background like watch dogs of state.

Kent stepped to the edge of the balcony and lifted his hand for silence, the same heavy, unfaltering man that had addressed them on one other occasion, when he mentally derided them and then disappeared. Again, as then, his great voice reached them like some enormous trumpet; but now there was nothing of cynicism or demagoguery in his words, no jesting with their ignorance.

"His Majesty Karl Second——"

"God Save Karl the Great!" they corrected him.

"—has told you that you owe much of what has been to-day given you, to me. With all respect for His Majesty's word, I wish to tell you, flatly, that it is not so. I did nothing. You owe it all to him. All I did was to advise regarding the employment of your industries. I approve of his grant of self-government, for I am an American; but I am as surprised as were you that he gave so freely."

They interrupted him with cheers, while he stood watching them, and evidently waiting to add something more.

"You owe me nothing," he declared. "But to others you owe much. You owe Her Royal Highness, the Princess Eloise, for her advice——" and again they interrupted him with cheers.

"You owe to a much misunderstood man, a nobleman, steadfast, loyal and true, a great payment for his unfaltering devotion to the king, to you and to his duty; and to his plain honesty you are indebted beyond all words. I speak of Baron Von Glutz!"

He did not look around in that mad interim when again they shouted; but had he done so would have seen that the baron was for once abashed to dumbness. All that he, plain, simple old man, had ever

asked, was to serve as best he might, careless of reward.

"Beyond this," continued the voice, "you must not forget the services of as good a Minister of Treasury as has ever conducted the affairs of a people or a king, Captain Philidor Paulo."

In a cheering mood, they cheered again.

"And from now on you owe it to yourselves, and your king, to those who have done the best they could for you, to make, by continued industry and integrity, the kingdom of Marken great. The king has made no mistake. You were not fit to conduct yourselves a year ago. Many of you were idle, lazy and indifferent. It required the inflexibility of an autocrat to arouse you. An autocrat is, after all, but a nurse. Once the necessity for a nurse passes, it passes for all time. You are a nation now, known and respected by the whole world. It rests with you whether that respect shall continue, and respect is a thing that accumulates or diminishes in just proportion to your deeds. It does not stand still. The respect given a nation is not measured by the breadth of its lands, or by what it owns. It is measured by the acts of the individuals who compose it. No man dare act otherwise than as a representative of his nation. On him individually rests the good name of his nation. He, as a unit, is as responsible for its reputation, as is the king him-

self. It is by his individual acts that his country is estimated. I ask you to remember my words and to consider them when alone, that you may find the right way, in this hour of your assumption of great responsibilities, to each adjust his own personal life to the demands of a high standard."

The crowd beneath had become hushed and thoughtful as he shot his words out to them. They expected in that grave moment that he would say more; but, as if daunted by his own temerity and unwonted publicity, he abruptly stopped, and like one suddenly frightened, turned and fled. The man on the fountain again lifted his hands and sang with that far-reaching voice. Again they joined him with a new fervour, containing in its volume some enormous throb, quite without excitement, quite grave in its sincerity.

The king, regardless of everything, forgetful of all save the terrific song which for centuries had led his people to the heights of endeavour, there to be crowned with death or victory, shut his eyes, threw his head back and sang with them. With a final outpouring of fervent wishes, the crowd saw him pass through the door, followed last of all by the white-headed old baron. The noise died away, and the palace gardens began to empty. The king looked around the room for

Kent. He was not to be seen. As if mortified by his own moralising, he had gone.

The door of the room adjoining stood ajar and the king walked to it, looked in, and halted in astonishment. Kent was standing alone by the side of his bed, in which lay Provarsk. The king hesitated for an instant and then turned and tip-toed away. The broken screen caught his glance and he paused above it, observing that Von Glutz and Paulo were both inspecting the same object.

The baron looked around with his slow eyes, and pointed at the tiny dent in the tiles, bordered with splotches of lead, and called attention to it with a significant smile.

"That," he said, "I take to be the last shot of the last revolt in Marken."

The king saw the American once more that day. It was after twilight, dusk and a full moon had followed one another across the trail of the skies. In the distance, where Marken huddled and shouldered on its hills, could be heard, mellowed, but expressive, the faint sounds of revelry. Great rockets marked fiery courses in the night and then showered upon the red roofs their softly floating and multi-hued rain of stars. Sometimes above the murmur of the notes of a military band might be heard, bearing through the distance, airs of triumphant peace. Very soothing they sounded to the king, who, exhausted by his day of excite-

ment and work, strolled meditatively in the garden that had so short a time before been trampled by the feet of a people freed. Here had his ambition been achieved in that hour when his subjects shouted to him their esteem. Here they had voiced more than esteem, and given him an outspoken affection. With that, all things could be accomplished.

He took a shorter way through the masses of roses, and came to a secluded path on which the moon seemed to peer intent. He stopped short and bent forward, unconsciously eavesdropping. Those were familiar voices, and familiar shapes, those of the princess walking with the American, whilst their arms, outlined in sombre black, and silken white, were around each other's waists. The king stepped into the path behind them and gave a loud "Ahem!"

Startled, and confused, they fell apart as they faced him. There was but a moment's hesitancy, and John Rhodes, recovering, closed the space between him and the Princess Eloise, and caught her waiting hand in his.

"By your leave, Sire," he said, to the king.

"Sir," said the king, "the honour is mine!"

THE END

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